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The University of Southern Mississippi

RACE AND JUSTICE

IN MISSISSIPPI'S CENTRAL PINEY WOODS, 1940-2010

by

Patricia Michelle Buzard-Boyett

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2011

The University of Southern Mississippi

RACE AND JUSTICE

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Abstract of a Dissertation
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ABSTRACT

RACE AND JUSTICE

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by Patricia Michelle Buzard-Boyett

May 2011

“Race and Justice in Mississippi’s Central Piney Woods, 1940-2010,” examines the black freedom struggle in Jones and Forrest counties. The writer concludes that more than any other region of Mississippi, the Central Piney Woods became the pivotal theater in the war for racial justice because the intensity of its racial oppression combined with its unparalleled suffrage campaign, and watershed street protests forced a federal alliance, instigated landmark court rulings, and generated black political victories that lay the foundations for a more equitable racial order. To obtain a broader perspective on the forces that transformed racial justice over time, this community study focuses on the nexus at which the civil right struggle, massive resistance, and federal intervention converged; and it expands the typical periodization of civil rights studies to examine the racial struggle from the Jim Crow era, through the Civil Rights Movement, and into the racial landscape of contemporary times.

The first stage of the modern black freedom struggle began in the Central Piney Woods on the eve of World War II as blacks capitalized on the termination of American isolationism to expose racial oppression in the South. Yet the pervasive racial police state prevented the rise of a full-scale revolt until the mid-sixties. In 1964, the black freedom struggle moved into its second stage when civil rights activists launched a decade-long revolt against the racial order that forced the dismantling of the Jim Crow state.

Determined to address inequities unresolved by the Civil Rights Movement, the freedom struggle moved into its third stage as local blacks launched a second movement to fight for political clout, economic equity, retributive justice, and the termination of discrimination in the schools, the courts, and city government. Although the struggle transformed the Central Piney Woods into the harbinger of biracial governing, economic, educational, and infrastructure disparities persisted, and the society was still largely segregated. At the least, as blacks had acquired substantial political power and as white progressivism had grown, the Central Piney Woods had an historic opportunity to address these disparities efficaciously and to seek a racially reconciled society.

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DEDICATION

For my husband, Ricky Boyett, who, with his many personal sacrifices, his brilliant and constructive critiques of my work, his technical genius in repairing broken computers, his constant encouragement, and his unwavering love, earned this degree with me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While working on my doctoral degree, I received extensive guidance and resources. I was fortunate to have the steadfast support of Dr. Bradley Bond, an exemplary scholar and patient mentor. He allowed me great freedom of academic exploration, which he tempered by challenging me always to support my vision with robust rationale, to defend each argument, to define each detail, and to write with conviction and purpose. I am also in debt to Dr. William Scarborough because he assumed with great vigor all the administrative and scholarly duties that he incurred as my official chair and because he shared with me his perspective of the racial struggle in Mississippi. His candor as an evaluator and as a subject of my dissertation proved invaluable. In addition, I wish to thank Dr. Neil McMillen as he guided me through my M. A. and because his impressive scholarship inspired me to become a historian.

I am grateful to The University of Southern Mississippi and RAND for providing me with grants and fellowships and to the many enthusiastic professors, archivists, and staff members who offered their aid and support. Drs. Curtis Austin, Louis Kyriakoudes, and Andrew Wiest have read through the latter drafts of my dissertation, and I appreciate their brilliant insights and guidance. Dr. Wiest, my first professor in my graduate career, has been a constant source of encouragement. Dr. Austin and Dr. Kyriakoudes, as well as Linda VanZandt and Stephanie Scull-DeArmeay, helped me mine through a treasure trove of oral histories housed at the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, and they provided me with equipment, contacts, and wise advice when I conducted my own interviews. I also extend my appreciation to the Chair of the History Department, Phyllis Jestice, and the Graduate Director, Kyle Zelner, for their support and to the amazing Shelia Smith as she manages the department and aids students with impressive adroitness

and enthusiasm. Many archivists and staff members provided me exceptional assistance, particularly Yvonne Arnold, Jennifer Brannock, Diane Ross, Danielle Bishop, Peggy Price, and student workers who located collections housed in McCain Library and Archives and copied numerous documents so I could continue my research after business hours. Many city, county, and state employees also graciously aided me in my research, especially Gwen Wilks and Debbie Benardo. I am deeply grateful to the men and women who participated in my oral history project and allowed me to intrude upon their lives as they shared with me their experiences in Mississippi's racial struggles.

My family and friends were a constant source of unwavering support as I pursued a most circuitous career path. Donnie and Becky Boyett, Mike Highlander, Grant Kiehl, Annette Scuderi, Diane Sheehan, Julia Walsh, Kari Kruesi, and Whitney Daley extended fellowship and encouragement. I was blessed with magnificent parents, Bonnie and Robert Buzard, who cultivated my aspirations with a wellspring of wisdom and love. My mom inculcated in me a reverence for language, narrative, and human struggles by coloring my childhood with literature and theater; and my dad taught me to seek truth, honor ethics, and to exhibit tenacity in the face of adversity. I was blessed also with amazing sisters, Cindy Kiehl and Jenny Highlander, both exemplary educators. Cindy helped me ignore the ubiquitous naysayer; Jenny listened endlessly to my ideas; and both of them inspired in me a devotion to education. I wish also to thank my nana, Teresa Temple, because she believed in dreams, and she never doubted mine. I am eternally grateful to my husband, Ricky Boyett, as he listened to every thesis and narrative development of my work, repaired my technical disasters, and endured with uncommon patience the long hours and the long years I devoted to my dissertation. Without his extraordinary love, I would have never completed this journey.

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INTRODUCTION:
THE RIGHT TO REVOLT

On January 10, 1966, the Klansmen blasted another rain of bullets into the shattered windows of the burning farmhouse in Forrest County, Mississippi. They would kill the black family with fire or bullets. It made no difference to them as long as they silenced the troublemaking NAACP “nigger” Vernon Dahmer. Inside the blazing home, the youngest of the eight Dahmer children, 10-year-old Bettie, cried as her mother once again futilely heaved her entire body against the jammed window that would not budge. They were trapped. “We’re not going to make it out of here,” Betty screamed as the fire roared down the hallway toward them. She saw no sign of her brothers whose bedrooms were at the other end of the house. Through the billowing black smoke, she saw her father in the kitchen where he had braced himself against the refrigerator, aimed his shotgun out the backdoor, and fired back at the Klansmen. Flames raced across the ceiling and dripped onto the little girl’s arms. Her father inhaled burning embers. Screams pierced through the raging fire outside, startling the youngest of the eight Klansmen. He looked at his klavern leader in horror, but the man shrugged, “ah hell let him die, that’s what we came for.”¹

In the aftermath of the Klan attack that killed Vernon Dahmer, injured his daughter, and destroyed the family home, local law enforcement cooperated with the

¹ First quote *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1998), case no. 6922 vol. 2, transcript, 9, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, [hereafter cited as *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998), transcript]; *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 14-15, 22-24, vol. 3, 17, 20-23; second quote Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 236; third quote, *Killed by the Klan*, prod. and dir. Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette; Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994.

federal government to punish the Klansmen while local white elites tried to mitigate federal intervention by spinning the brutal assault into an aberration in Forrest County, a landscape they portrayed as otherwise racially moderate and civilized. The local lore survived for generations. During the University of Southern Mississippi's racial justice forum on August 29, 2000, James Dukes, the former county attorney who had prosecuted many of the Klansmen for the attack on the Dahmers in the 1960s, characterized Forrest County whites, particularly white jurors, as "heroes," because he claimed that unlike the citizens of Neshoba and Adams counties, Mississippi and Birmingham, Alabama, they refused to tolerate racial violence and returned convictions. Dukes also emphasized that the Klansmen who attacked Dahmer hailed from neighboring Jones County. Yet Jones County whites often tried to portray their county as racially progressive and referred to its second district of Laurel as "liberal Laurel." One local scholar even argues that Laurel's white elites fostered a "progressive outlook [that] transcended traditional racial divisions and helped create a town of the 'New South' in the heart of the Piney Woods." Most local blacks disagreed. They considered Jones and Forrest counties bastions of racial oppression, for in every "black household" stories passed "from generation to generation" of police brutality, false imprisonments, Klan attacks, and lynchings.²

² First quote, James K. Dukes, "Pursuing a Late Justice: The Prosecution of Mississippi's Civil Rights Murders, Then and Now," August 29, 2000, videocassette, Vernon F. Dahmer Collection, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]; second quote, Alex Heard, *The Eyes of Willie McGee: A Tragedy of Race, Sex, and Secrets in the Jim Crow South* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 34; third quote, David Stanton Key, "Laurel, Mississippi: A Historical Perspective," (M.A. thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2001), 25; fourth and fifth quotes, Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording,

The contrasting local narratives as espoused by blacks and whites reflected important realities of Forrest and Jones counties, but both were incomplete. The exceptionalism of the two counties, which the writer jointly refers to as the Central Piney Woods, stemmed neither from their racial enlightenment nor their racial extremism. Rather, it emerged from their dichotomy as landscapes that at times epitomized the tortured racial horrors of the South and at others departed from it in significant ways. The writer argues that between 1940 and 2010, the competing forces of white supremacist radicals, conservatives, and moderates collided with each other as well as with federal actors and black and white civil rights activists in a series of battles that transformed the Central Piney Woods into Mississippi's pivotal theater in the struggle for racial justice and its harbinger of biracial governing.

The Central Piney Woods became the central battleground for several reasons. First, beginning in World War II when conservative whites tried to sustain their white supremacist tyranny through police state tactics and radical whites through racial terrorism, they incited national and international protests that initiated and accelerated

interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and bound transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]; Cleveland Payne, *The Oak Park Story: A Cultural History* (Laurel, Mississippi: National Oak Park High School Alumni Association), 1988; Cleveland Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community, 1882-1962* (Laurel, Mississippi: C, Payne, 1990). James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008, Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008; Clarence Magee, interview, September 25, 2008; Douglass T. Baker, interview, September 24, 2008; Cheryl Outlaw, interview, October 2, 2008; Johnny Magee, interview, May 12, 2009; Lula Cooley, interview, May 13, 2010, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. Constance Baker, interview by Kim Adams, April 3, 1995, Ariel Barnes, interview by Priscilla Walker, January 6, 1995, Ariel Barnes, interview by Sarah Rowe, April 1, 1993, all in MOHP Digital.

federal intervention in Mississippi. Second, the progressive economic milieu in the Central Piney Woods had fostered the development of an ambitious black bourgeois and a stable black working class who used their financial power and education to become the vanguard of the Mississippi Movement by instigating an unparalleled suffrage campaign and watershed street protests. Third, after the murder of Dahmer centered the federal war on the Klan in the Central Piney Woods, the effort of white moderates and some conservatives to save white-rule while accepting a modicum of racial justice and black uplift backfired as it only intensified black activism and federal intervention. The intensity of both the black revolt and the white crackdown, particularly white terrorism, forced a federal war on the white terrorists, landmark federal court rulings, and civil rights legislation that decimated the Klan, ensured black suffrage, terminated *de jure* segregation, and integrated the schools. The Central Piney Woods became the harbinger of biracial rule because in the mid-seventies, the black bourgeois and the black working class launched a renewed struggle against the ruling class of conservatives and moderates to address injustices and discriminations unresolved by the Movement. Although racial inequities persisted, by 2010 civil rights leaders had laid the foundations for biracial governing and a more equitable racial order.

“Race and Justice in Mississippi’s Central Piney Woods, 1940-2010,” is the story of the struggle for racial justice in Jones and Forrest counties; it examines the racial oppression and the racial progress that entangled and shaped their landscapes; and it explores their persistent, dangerous, and long struggle for justice, liberty, and equality that transformed them. Because Jones and Forrest counties lay at the heart of Mississippi’s Piney Woods in terms of location, population, economic growth, and racial

conflicts and because their racial oppression and revolts rendered them the hub of the Mississippi Movement and placed them at the vortex of the racial transformation of the state, the writer refers to them jointly as the Central Piney Woods. Both counties are located in the southeastern quadrant of the state in the Piney Woods region that acquired its name because of its dense forests abounding with longleaf pines from the Pearl River in the west to the Alabama border on the east. Some of the first settlers exalted the feral forests as “majestic,” while others condemned the inhospitable woods, overgrown thickets, and dark swamps teeming with predatory animals as “no man’s land.”³

Despite the rough terrain, pioneers carved a frontier out of the wilderness; and during the late 1800s, railroad barons, lumber tycoons, and business moguls seized the still largely virgin forests and centered their operations upon the lands that became Hattiesburg in Forrest County and Laurel in Jones County. Forrest County, a flat, somewhat fertile prairie surrounded and penetrated by rivers and creeks, flourished into a thriving commercial hub; its northern neighbor Jones County, where rolling and rough uplands surrounded by streams and waterways slope softly down to the bottom lands, burgeoned into a booming industrial center. The Central Piney Woods’ unique topography and historical development forced its white citizenry to struggle more than their counterparts in other regions of Mississippi with the difficulties of pursuing the

³ First quote, Susie V. Powell, “Assignment #8,” June 10, 1936, United States Works Progress Administration, Unpublished Files, Jones County, Microfilm, Reel 2870, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as WPA Files]; second quote, Lonnie Wheeler, “Knight Legend Lives On In Mulatto Offspring,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, October 6, 1977, newspaper clipping, Newton Knight Descendants Vertical File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM]. “Flora,” WPA Files, Forrest County, Reel 2857; John Ray Skates, “Hattiesburg: The Early Years,” *Hattiesburg: A Pictorial History*, ed. Kenneth G. McCarty, Jr. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 5.

progress that accompanies socioeconomic modernization while preserving their oppressive white supremacist caste system.⁴

The Central Piney Woods emerged from Reconstruction and Redemption fettered with dichotomies of Old South nostalgia and New South imaginations, Manichean in its white tyranny and black subjugation, but driven too by dreams of economic progress that encouraged black uplift and begged for biracial harmony. Because throughout most of the Jim Crow era, racist mentalities overwhelmed progressive ideals, the Central Piney Woods was, in part, a microcosm of the Mississippi racial police state. In most white minds, blacks had to be tamed into submission to the racial order or removed from the landscape. Whites perpetuated the white supremacist pathology born in slavery by constructing a racial tyranny built upon the racist mentality of their forebears. As sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe argues in *Race and Racism*, whites had justified the paradoxes in societies that espoused the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment while perpetuating slavery by “dichotomiz[ing] humanity between men and submen (or the ‘civilized’ and the ‘savages’).” By bestializing persons of color, they limited the application of Enlightenment liberties to whites—the only race they considered fully human. After emancipation, white southerners replaced their plantation system with Jim Crow. Van den Berghe terms the new southern “regimes . . . that are democratic for the

⁴ The Hattiesburg Story,” The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce promotion booklet, n. d., 1, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as HACCR]; “Formation,” and “Topography,” WPA Files, Forrest County, Reel 2857; Marda Burton, “Two Centennial Towns: Laurel & Hattiesburg,” *Mississippi Magazine*, November/December 1990, newspaper clipping, Laurel 1990 Vertical File, McCain, USM; Amanda O. Boutwell and Evie Irby “Formation of County, Report” March 20, 1936, and Ruth Bethea, Evie Irby, Erla Best, Amanda O. Boutwell, “Assignment #4,” April 9, 1936, both in WPA Files, Jones County, Reel 2870; Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South, Mississippi, 1830-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 133, 210-211; 224-225.

master race but tyrannical for the subordinate groups . . . *Herrenvolk* democracies.” Like van den Bergh, historian George Fredrickson, who has popularized the term *Herrenvolk* democracies in his many studies of white supremacy, often characterizes Jim Crow as a despotic regime for the subjugated race.⁵

Rather than using the term *Herrenvolk* democracies, this dissertation characterizes the Jim Crow system as a white supremacist tyranny and a police state because it resembled a dictatorship for blacks and to some extent for whites who violated the racial order. Similar to other despotic regimes, the white patriarchs created a one-party rule in the South during the Redemption era by violently suppressing racial progressivism. After the Redeemers linked the Republican Party with Yankees, scalawags, carpetbaggers, and disfranchised blacks, it virtually died as a party in the South for nearly a century; and the patriarchs drove nascent third parties like the Populists from the landscape. Although all white men enjoyed suffrage, as the South became a one-party region, progressive whites lacked the ability to comprehensively challenge the political philosophy or the power of their white supremacist leaders.⁶

⁵ Quoting Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Study* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), 18; *Ibid.*, 126. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, Reprinted 1987); George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). *Herrenvolk* is derived from the combination of two German words *Herren*—the plural of “master” and *volk*—“people, nation” and is defined as “master race,” see *The Free Dictionary by Farlax*, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>.

⁶ Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*; Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South, Mississippi, 1830-1900*, 151-182, 254-295; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 35-71.

As the dissertation will show, the subjugated black race suffered under all the dictatorial oppressions of an absolutist state; and whites, as members of the designated master race, only enjoyed their privileges and liberties if they conformed to the racial order. Blacks were turned into noncitizens divested of suffrage, civil liberties, and judicial protections. They had no right to protest their oppression or petition their government. The white patriarchs perpetuated a free society of whites who accepted the system and a totalitarian society for blacks by separating the races through segregation laws and customs. They also strictly enforced the sexual color line for white women and black men. In contrast, white men could invade black communities and violate black bodies at will. Blacks, and to a lesser degree white women, lacked the right to protect their bodies, and their freedom of movement was greatly restricted. White authorities and citizens enforced the racial order through police state tactics and mob brutality. White terrorization of black bodies and black psyches most readily evinced itself in lynchings, murders, rapes, police beatings, false prosecutions, and state sanctioned executions, all of which effectively sustained black subjugation and white privilege. Whites who violated the white supremacist orthodoxy could also suffer under the police state as whites lacked the liberty intrinsic in democracies to act upon their own consciences. The few whites who questioned the racial order faced ostracism, personal ruin, and even violence. As most whites considered those members of their race who intermarried with blacks as divesting themselves of their whiteness, they treated them in the same vein as the subjugated black race. The patriarchs perpetuated their despotic regimes by inculcating in their progeny a devotion to the white orthodoxy.

Contrary to the white local lore, the Central Piney Woods was as devoted to its white tyranny as the more notorious regions of the state. The 1966 Klan assault on the Dahmer family was not an aberration as Dukes and many white citizens purported. Rather, the crime emerged from a torturous racial history that linked Forrest and Jones counties as their violent racial trajectories routinely paralleled each other, and with the Dahmer case, and many other racial atrocities, they often intersected in brutal paths toward tragic ends. In terms of lynchings, Forrest County had a more violent record than Jones County as well as the South's more infamous landscapes. Dukes' claims notwithstanding, Forrest County whites lynched more blacks than their counterparts in Neshoba and Adams counties and the city of Birmingham combined. Its county seat, Hattiesburg, ranked ninth in the number of black lynchings in the 210 Mississippi towns experiencing such killings in the state's history. Jones County also became the center of racial violence as it produced one of the most macabre lynchings in Mississippi, facilitated the state sanctioned execution of an innocent black man, and served as the headquarters of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.⁷

Still, the white local lore was not without any merit, for the Central Piney Woods was also home to whites who abetted black uplift and sometimes mitigated white violence. White conservatives, radicals, and liberals, as Joel Williamson defined them in *The Crucible of Race*, all existed in the Central Piney Woods. As Williamson noted, although conservatives perceived blacks as lesser humans who could become animalistic if not properly controlled, they also considered them an important part of southern society

⁷ The National Lists: Places of Death, *The Lynching Century: African Americans Who Died in Racial Violence in the United States*, <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Base/8507/NLPlaces1.htm>, [hereinafter cited as The National Lists, *The Lynching Century*].

as long as they accepted their ascribed status of inferiority. Conservatives needed blacks as laborers, domestics, and sharecroppers, and they even supported black professionals and entrepreneurs because they buttressed segregation by providing blacks with their own schools, churches, and business services barred to them on the white side of town.

Moreover, the demand for black labor forced whites to offer blacks greater incentives to remain in or to relocate to the region. In contrast to the conservatives, radicals perceived blacks as innately animalistic creatures who could never be tamed and who threatened to ruin the South, and thus, they sought to drive blacks from the Central Piney Woods.

Although Williamson's southern liberals, which the writer refers to as moderates, perceived blacks as inferior beings who could never achieve equality with whites, they theorized that if whites improved the black condition through white spiritual, cultural, and scholastic instruction, blacks could become productive members of a society that was integrated on some levels. The Central Piney Woods was also home to white progressives who believed in the equality of the races, and some of them supported miscegenation as the means to remove the racial divide. However, they became marginalized after the failures of Reconstruction.

In contrast to Williamson's South in which conservatives, radicals, and liberals/moderates emerged and receded at different intervals, all of these forces maintained a constant presence in the Central Piney Woods. Although during the Jim Crow era in the Central Piney Woods, conservatives and radicals dominated the landscape, moderates maintained a significant presence, and sometimes they persuaded conservatives to accept some of their ideas and policies, particularly local funding for the education of blacks. Moreover, in Jones and Forrest counties, the lines between

conservatives and radicals were not as rigid as Williamson perceived them, for whites often vacillated in their racial mentalities depending upon the situation they confronted. For example, when a racial crisis arose, conservatives often adopted more radical perspectives whereas during less threatening times, radicals shifted toward conservative ideologies. Still, no matter the tenor of the times, conservatives, radicals, and moderates sustained a pervasive fealty for white supremacy to ensure the perpetual oppression of blacks, and the marginalized progressives fell silent.⁸

Within the confines of the white supremacist tyranny, a black rebellion would prove suicidal. Although blacks never accepted the racial order, they accommodated to it. Accommodation served not only as a survival mechanism but as a means for blacks to prepare their progeny for the second black freedom struggle that they always believed would come. On the black side of the color line, African Americans built vibrant communities that survived the onslaught of the white supremacist tyranny by taking advantage of the unique commercial and manufacturing opportunities open to them and by exploiting the ironic business prospects that segregation provided. Over the next several generations, they built cohesive, beloved, educated communities that fostered black capitalism and black uplift. Finally, during World War II when changes on the

⁸ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). For the many white racial mentalities in Mississippi, see Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South, Mississippi, 1830-1900*. For the various white racial mentalities in the Central Piney Woods, see Victoria Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community, 1882-1962*; Payne, *The Oak Park Story*; James Street, *Look Away: A Dixie Notebook* (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), 11-18, 27-38; Hulon Myers, interview by Orley Caudill, July 11, 1979, vol. 349, 16-23, 27-28, 38-39, MOHP. Gladys Austin, interview, by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009; Susan Vincent, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009; Vernon Dahmer, Jr., interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 2, 2001, all MOHP recordings.

international and national stage provided blacks with an opportunity to renew their liberation struggle, they had developed an ambitious vanguard of black bourgeois and a stable black working class equipped with the ability and determination to launch a black rebellion. The Central Piney Woods was not a haven of racial enlightenment, though it had its sanctuaries; neither was it a feudal fiefdom that chained blacks to serfdom, though it had its manacles. It was a white supremacist tyranny enforced by its police state and white terrorism, but one that permitted a degree of black uplift as long as blacks never crossed racial boundaries or threatened the racial order. It was the best and worst of Mississippi.

As the struggle in the Central Piney Woods produced some of the most important changes in Mississippi and the South, it has attracted the attention of scholars, but none has attempted to explore the transformation of either Jones or Forrest counties from Jim Crow through the post civil rights era. Several studies of the federal government's war on the Klan examine the Dahmer murder and investigation and offer significant insight into the impact of federal actors and Klansmen on racial justice. Victoria Bynum's pioneering research in *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* unearths valuable untapped sources on the shift of Jones County from its frontier roots to its Jim Crow era; and journalist Alex Heard's *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee* delves into a provocative examination of the racial and gender prejudices surrounding the execution of a black man after his conviction for interracial rape in Jones County. Sandra Adickes' *The Legacy of a Freedom School* and John Dittmer's *Local People* provide important analysis of the impact of the Hattiesburg Movement on Mississippi. Most of these works, however, underestimate the intensity of white violence and massive resistance in the Central Piney

Woods. In the recently published *Count Them One by One* that examines the *U. S. v. Theron Lynd* watershed voting case in Forrest County, Gordon A. Martin Jr. underlies both the progressive and radical elements that led to the success of the case, and he briefly summarizes the Hattiesburg Movement, but he does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the local struggle. Each of the histories, the snapshot synopses, and the local lore of Forrest and Jones counties capture some important images, but like scattered puzzle pieces, they paint an incomplete picture.⁹

This dissertation seeks to paint a broader portrait of the racial transformation of Jones and Forrest counties by examining all the significant actors and institutions involved in the 70 year passage of the Central Piney Woods from the Jim Crow white supremacist tyranny to the post civil rights biracial republic. As such, it is a social, judicial, political, and economic history of two counties, and it draws from various historiographical approaches. The writer tackles the quarrels that abound in the civil rights compendium over the magnitude of the participants, the effectiveness of strategies, the outcome of the struggle, and the periodization of the Movement. In the vein of revisionist scholarship, this dissertation challenges the traditional tendency to perceive the Civil Rights Movement as a monolithic struggle with a few pivotal leaders, a

⁹ Bradley G. Bond, "Herders, Farmers, and Markets on the Inner Frontier: The Mississippi Piney Woods, 1850-1860," *Plain Folk of the South Revisited*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 78; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 233-258, 302-303; Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 28-29, 54; Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 178-184, 219-221; Sandra Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Gordon A. Martin, Jr., *Count Them One by One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*.

definitive starting point and completion, one set of strategies, and the same outcome in every community. The traditional interpretations led to generalizations that ignored the disagreements and complexities of the struggle, and they neglected the contributions of local leaders and community members. For example, Taylor Branch and David J. Garrow employ a King-centric model that perceives the Montgomery Boycott in 1955 as the opening salvo of the Movement and the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis as its conclusion. Scholars focused on the federal government's role often perceive *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) as the launching point and the Selma-to-Montgomery March that produced the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as the dénouement. Although the writer disagrees with the generalized timeline, she acknowledges the magnitude of these top-down studies in conveying the significant roles of national civil rights leaders, national organizations, and the federal government in the racial struggle, for all of them were important actors on the national stage, and they often emerge as significant agents in the Central Piney Woods movements. Similarly, the writer recognizes the significance of top-down and bottom-up studies of white supremacists, for as Neil R. McMillen argues, "the oppressed cannot be studied in isolation of the oppressor." Studies on southern governments, the Klan, and the Citizens Council offer great insight into the complexities of massive resistance.¹⁰

In terms of periodization, the writer relies heavily on the work of Neil R. McMillen, Harvard Sitkoff, Charles E. Silberman, and Richard M. Dalfume who broadly

¹⁰ Quoting McMillen, *Dark Journey*, xiv. Charles Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *The Journal of Southern History*, 66 (Nov., 2000): 815-848; Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," *The American Historical Review*, 96 (April 1991), 456-471; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 413-441.

redefined the timeline of civil rights studies as they argue that the prelude to the black freedom struggle emerged during World War I, the New Deal, and World War II respectively. Community and state studies also proved invaluable to the writer. Robert J. Norrell's *Reaping the Whirlwind*, William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Liberties*, Adam Fairclough's *Race and Democracy*, John Dittmer's *Local People*, Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Charles Eagles *The Price of Defiance*, and Emily Crosby's *A Little Taste of Freedom* reveal that the Movement developed differently as it spread across the South. Locals and organizers in communities across the vast southern landscape initiated a town movement according to the indigenous capacities to birth and cultivate local protest and confront the dangers posed by white supremacists. Many of them break with the traditional timeline paradigms. Fairclough argues that in Louisiana "black protest between the late 1930s and the mid-1950s constituted more than a mere prelude to the drama proper: it was the first act of a two act play." Although in Mississippi sporadic protests emerged at various intervals during the twentieth century, not a single city experienced a full-scale sustainable revolt until 1959, and it took several more years to launch a statewide Movement. The differing circumstances and milieus across the South also caused the tactics and strategies to diverge at points, and the results of each community and state struggle varied. Certainly, many threads connected the various local movements into a common tapestry, but each community provided its unique design.¹¹

¹¹ Quoting Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Harvard Sitkoff, "The New Deal and Race Relations," *Fifty Years Later: The New Deal Evaluated*, ed. Sitkoff (New York: Knopf, 1985); Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1966); Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro

In hopes of weaving into that historical tapestry a comprehensive portrait of the Central Piney Woods, the writer employs a methodology Steven F. Lawson terms the “interactive model,” which synthesizes top-down and bottom-up approaches; and like many state and community studies, this dissertation expands the traditional periodization of the second black freedom struggle. “Race and Justice in the Central Piney Woods, 1940-2010,” is a community study in the foremost sense of the concept because rather than focusing primarily on the civil rights struggle, or massive resistance, or federal intervention, it is the nexus—the clashing and coalescing of all the forces emerging from within the Central Piney Woods or converging upon it from without—that take center stage. It examines the interactions between civil rights leaders, field organizers, and volunteers; local black participants, non-participants, and white collaborators; federal, state, and local officials; Klansmen, mobs, and Citizens Council members; and conservative, moderate, and progressive whites. Within the broadened scope, the writer analyzes how the intersections of all these forces shaped and changed the black freedom

Revolution,” *Journal of American History*, 55 (June 1968): 90-106; McMillen, *Dark Journey*; Neil R. McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997); William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Liberties: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1985); Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*; Dittmer, *Local People*; Emilye Crosby, *A Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Gilbert R. Mason with James Patterson Smith, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor’s Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000).

struggle in the Central Piney Woods from Jim Crow through the Movement and post-civil rights struggle and into the tenuous racial landscape of contemporary times.¹²

The macro examination reveals that the black freedom struggle began in the Central Piney Woods amidst World War II, but the intensity of white oppression prevented a full-scale revolt until the mid-sixties. The ten-year racial conflict that erupted in 1964 dismantled Jim Crow, but failed to produce a racially equitable society. Thus, in the 1970s, blacks launched a new struggle to address the injustices and inequities unresolved by the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the 70 year black freedom struggle, activists have employed a variety of strategies including nonviolence and violence, protests and lawsuits, voting drives and media exposes, and lobbying political leaders and running for office. Many federal and state actors and institutions as well as national and state civil rights and white supremacist leaders and organizations have effected great changes in the Central Piney Woods, and their impact is explored whenever they entered or impacted the community. However, the local people determined most the direction of the Central Piney Woods. After all, local blacks began the revolution and local whites launched the counterrevolution, and both remained long after the visitors departed. As the focus remains on the community, local whites and blacks—or as some might classify them ordinary people—dominate the narrative. Yet whether they fought for or against the black freedom struggle, they took extraordinary actions that had the greatest impact on the Central Piney Woods, on the state of Mississippi, and sometimes on the nation; and ultimately they were not really so ordinary and neither was their community.

¹² Quoting Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now,” 457.

Across the South, the overarching story of the black southern freedom struggle is one of two trilogies. The first trilogy is one of tragedy that spawned and cultivated black oppression with slavery, birthed the foundations for freedom with the Civil War and Reconstruction, but vanquished it with the victory of white supremacy in Redemption. The second trilogy is one of triumph as blacks survived and even flourished during the entrenchment of the Jim Crow tyranny through tactics of accommodation to launch a second successful liberation struggle during the Movement and a post civil rights battle for racial equity. This dissertation primarily focuses on the second trilogy. To mark the evolution of the second black freedom struggle's three distinct stages in the Central Piney Woods, the dissertation is divided into three parts, each thematically represented by Hobbesian, Lockean, and Fanonian metaphors of the governing mechanisms in each phase: Part I: "White Leviathan: State of Tyranny," Part II: "Black Revolt: State of War," and Part III: "Biracial Republic: State of Commonwealth." The chapter titles also serve as themes and maps of the struggle. As white and black leaders sought to win the war of ideas and accomplish their respective missions, they invoked and recast ideologies of liberty in their political and legal dogmas, military strategies and tactics, and Christian tenets and parables to suit and shape their opposing arguments. The chapter titles incorporate the metaphors their battles evoked and serve as a compass in the journey: "Heresies," "Inquisitions," "Reformation," "Revolutions," "Invasion," "Decolonization," "Infiltration," "Insurrection," "Mutiny," "Stalemate," "Reconstruction," "Gadflies," "Reckonings," and "Purgatory." Each act of the black freedom struggle trilogy in the Central Piney Woods encompasses overarching arguments, themes, and developments

that established its two counties as the hub of the racial transformation of the state, and they are briefly summarized below.

Part I “White Leviathan: State of Tyranny” (1940-1963) examines the beginnings of the black freedom struggle in the Central Piney Woods as blacks capitalized on World War II and the Cold War to expose on the world stage the gaping chasm between the rhetoric of American freedom and the reality of the South’s racial oppression. Because the Central Piney Woods became a citadel of white supremacist tyranny during the Jim Crow era that rivaled the more notorious regions like the Delta, the pervasive racial police state prevented the rise of a full-scale revolt until the mid-sixties. Nevertheless, sporadic black activism emerged, including the founding of local branches of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the biracial organization of labor unions, the initiation of federal lawsuits challenging black disfranchisement, the lobbying of U. S. Congress for civil rights legislation, and the alliance of locals with the new more radical civil rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Whites reacted to the renewed federal threat to its racial order and black activism with police state tactics that included the mob lynching of Howard Wash during World War II, the state sanctioned execution of Willie McGee at the onset of the Cold War, and the malicious prosecution of Clyde Kennard on false charges of burglary to terminate his effort to desegregate the local college. Although white supremacists obliterated several threats to their racial order, they failed to eradicate the underground revolutionary networks that laid the foundations for the explosion of the Civil Rights Movement in the Central Piney Woods.

In 1964, local blacks, with the aid of national civil rights field organizers, launched a series of massive protests that catapulted the Central Piney Woods into its second stage, Part II “Black Revolt: State of War” (1964-1974). Activists defined their right to revolt in Christian and Lockean terms as they demanded their God-given and constitutional liberties. Enraged and frightened whites unleashed a counterrevolution that plunged the Central Piney Woods into a decade-long war of attrition. The Central Piney Woods became the most significant beachhead of the Mississippi Movement when Hattiesburg launched its Freedom Days campaign in the winter of 1964 to challenge the local registrar’s violation of federal court rulings to register blacks. Months later, the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 proved particularly successful in the Central Piney Woods. Hattiesburg hosted the largest freedom schools in the state; Laurel’s youth launched some of the most powerful sit-ins across the South; and both counties produced impressive voter-registration campaigns. The massive mobilization of local blacks empowered the local struggles and ensured their endurance. White conservatives sought to suppress the Movement and mitigate federal intervention with a strategy of nonviolent massive resistance in public and police brutality in the jails. Yet Sam Bowers disrupted their efforts when he founded the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Laurel and spread terror across the Central Piney Woods and the state. The Klan murder of Vernon Dahmer only intensified black resolve as blacks launched a series of protests against police brutality, political exclusion, and economic discrimination. Moreover, it centered the FBI’s war against the Klan in the Central Piney Woods which led to a series of significant convictions. Persistent intransigence by white conservatives and moderates along with sustained black activism also heightened federal intervention

which coalesced with struggles across Mississippi and the South to produce landmark federal court rulings and civil rights legislation that protected black suffrage, terminated *de jure* segregation, and integrated the schools. The Central Piney Woods struggle produced some of the most important changes of the Movement. For example, the *U.S. v. Theron Lynd* voting case combined with the local protests forced watershed court rulings and helped foster the development and passage of the Voting Rights Act. The Klan killing of Dahmer led to the first state murder convictions of Klansmen, marginalized white radicals, and encouraged the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The intensity of both the black revolt and the white crackdown in places like the Central Piney Woods dismantled Jim Crow.

Still, racial inequity persisted which led to the final act of the second black freedom struggle in the Central Piney Woods, Part III “Biracial Republic: State of Commonwealth” (1974-2008). After the destruction of Jim Crow, white conservatives and moderates sustained control over the Central Piney Woods and prevented blacks from becoming first class citizens with equal rights and liberties by obstructing their political power, stunting their economic opportunities, and perpetuating racial injustices. In response, local blacks and their white allies launched a Second Reconstruction in the 1970s and a Second Movement in the 1980s and 1990s to protest police brutality, and to fight for political clout, economic equity, retributive justice, and the termination of discrimination in the schools, the courts, and city government. The struggles proved fruitful. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Central Piney Woods became the harbinger of biracial governing. Although the reversal of racial political power in 2001 led to charges of reverse racism, the political battles ultimately forced a

racial détente as whites and blacks accepted a new balance of racial political power. The achievements of the black freedom struggle, though monumental, are still far from complete. Educational, judicial, economic, and infrastructure disparities have trapped many poor blacks in a state that civil rights litigator and author Michelle Alexander terms an “*undercaste*.” Furthermore, the Central Piney Woods is still largely a segregated society. Of course, the segregation is now of the *de facto* rather than the *de jure* variety. Although the citizens have yet to achieve a state of peace, they have created a state of commonwealth based on Lockean liberty. Moreover, as blacks have acquired substantial political power and as white progressivism has grown, the Central Piney Woods has an historic opportunity to address these disparities efficaciously and to seek a racially reconciled society.¹³

To understand the exceptionalism that produced the second black freedom struggle, it is necessary to briefly examine the roots of the first black freedom struggle and its destruction. The few scholars who have examined the Piney Woods of the 1800s diverge over the racial ethic that dominated its frontier roots. Victoria Bynum suggests in *The Free State of Jones* that during the frontier, Civil War, and early Reconstruction years, racial ambivalence prevented the triumph of white supremacy in Jones County as “racial boundaries were fluid” and “Southerners still debated appropriate black/white relations.” In contrast, Bradley G. Bond argues in *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South, Mississippi, 1830-1900* that the white supremacist ethic survived the

¹³ Quoting Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 13. Thomas Hobbes, “Leviathan,” and John Locke, “Second Treaties of Government,” both in *Classic of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 741-745; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

chaos of the frontier, the Civil War, and Reconstruction as well as the individualism of the rising commercial order. Bond's interpretation of Mississippi whites as nearly monolithic in their support of white supremacy is more convincing than Bynum's assertions of racial fluidity in one of its counties. Still, Bynum taps into a stream of racial rebellion in the Central Piney Woods that spawned both the wave of white tyranny that flooded the landscape and the boiling well of racial revolt that sprung from its roots.¹⁴

Violence and rebellion had defined the Central Piney Woods since white inhabitants trickled into the feral wilderness and settled on the Choctaw lands ceded to the United States in 1805 and opened to settlement in 1808. Settlers struggled in a state of nature existence, which, as Bond argues, was a Hobbesian state of war as limited resources pitted settlers both against each other and the wilderness, and life was "truly nasty, brutish, and not infrequently short." Yet as Bynum suggests, it was also a Lockean state of freedom in which the weak, disjointed society left inhabitants free to develop and pursue their own sets of values and ambitions. Similar to many slaveholders, John Kelly and his son Green, who settled on the Leaf River in an area that later became Forrest County, engaged in affairs with their slave Sarah. As in most frontier societies, a dearth of white women led other settlers to engage in interracial affairs with blacks and Indians. These interracial relationships differed slightly from other places because as the untamed topography deterred migration, the frontier era elongated and inhibited the ability of ministers and masters to enforce racial mores. Thus, interracial relationships lasted longer and produced substantial mixed race societies. As the population grew, residents battled

¹⁴ Quoting Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 183. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South, Mississippi, 1830-1900*.

violently over the trajectory of their society with some supporting a slaveholding plutocracy and others holding fast to yeomanry concepts of white egalitarianism.¹⁵

Divisions often emerged within families. Newton Knight, a grandson of a slaveholder, opposed the Civil War when it erupted in 1861, but he considered it his duty to protect his homeland from northern invasion and volunteered for service. In 1862, after the Confederacy passed the Twenty-Negro Law, which exempted slaveholders owning 20 persons or more from conscription, Knight deserted. When Confederate armies hunted deserters, Knight formed a guerrilla army of mostly yeomen, proclaimed his homeland the Free State of Jones, declared the Confederates invaders, and pledged to free the slaves. Several slaves, including Rachel, a mulatto slave of Knight's grandfather, served as spies and sources of food and supplies as the Knight Company assassinated Confederate leaders, ambushed their brigades, and fought their troops in at least six battles along the tributaries of the Leaf River. Knight also suffered great loss as Confederate Colonel Robert Lowry condemned the Knight Company as a band of traitors and ordered the hanging of the captured, including Knight's 27-year-old cousin. Although the Civil War ended in 1865, the struggle for control of the Central Piney Woods persisted. Knight and his First Lieutenant Jasper Collins never forgave Lowry for

¹⁵ Quoting Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 17, 14-15, *Ibid.*, 16-29. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 29-48, 59-61; Hobbes, "Leviathan," 632-633; Locke, "Second Treaties of Government," 741-745; Early Settlement and Settlers, "Formation" WPA Files, Forrest County, Reel 2857; Mississippi Total Slaves by County, The United States Historical Census Browser, Census Data Over Time, <http://fisher.lib.Virginia.edu> (accessed August 2008); Ruth L. Bates, *Before There Was a Mississippi* (Kearney, Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 1999), 6-7; Iola Williams, Craft Family: Generation I, and Kelley Family: Generation II, in, *The Family of Charles and Laura Craft*, unpublished genealogical and oral history study in author's possession. Bates claims that Sarah was a "hand" not a slave, but Williams' study proved Sarah and her children were slaves.

the hangings. Decades after the war, Collins told a friend that he would “get up on the coldest night he ever saw to kill Lowry if he knew he was passing through Jones County.”¹⁶

The close of the war failed to terminate the state of nature existence, for just as the lack of a universally accepted political, legal, and community authority had prevented the creation of the Hobbesian “Leviathan” or Lockean “commonwealth” to control the populous before and during the war, divisiveness over the peace in the sparsely populated frontier prevented the emergence of a stable governing body in the post-war era. Sporadic interracial sexual liaisons persisted in the divided society, and freed blacks looked to Reconstruction with great hope. Knight, who served as commissioner in the Reconstruction government, engaged in a public affair with Rachel. John Kelly had freed his mixed-race children with his slave Sarah before the war. Two of his mixed-race children, Richmond and Warren, began acquiring land in the Kelly Settlement in 1862 through homesteading. Still, as southern resistance to Reconstruction hardened and the population in the Central Piney Woods grew, Lockean freedoms receded.¹⁷

Mississippi like many southern states refused to ratify the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments which emancipated all slaves, and provided equal citizenship, protection of the law, and the franchise to the freedmen. Most southern states virtually re-enslaved African Americans through the passage of the Black Code which tied blacks to

¹⁶ Quoting Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 129; *Ibid.*, 98-129. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 133-134; Lonnie Wheeler, “Knight Legend Lives On In Mulatto Offspring,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, October 6, 1977, Newton Knight Descendants Vertical File, LRM.

¹⁷ First quote, Hobbes, “Leviathan,” 650; second quote, Locke, “Second Treaties of Government,” 766.

their former master's lands via vagrancy laws and forced apprenticeships. Jones County whites largely embraced the southern revolt against Reconstruction. However, the Knight Company rebellion continued to haunt them. In the late 1860s, a Mississippi newspaper blamed the Free State of Jones when a black man allegedly raped a white woman in Jones County. The victim's husband led the mob that tracked the suspected rapist with hounds and then "skinned him alive." The reporters stressed that during the "days of the confederacy," Jones County obtained a notorious reputation as a "refuge of deserters," and they claimed that Reconstruction forced southerners to demonstrate their loyalty to the Union by allowing "negroes" to engage in "any sort of devilment without retribution." Yet they also inferred that the lynching represented a new shift in the collective white psyche in Jones County where "rebellion is rampant."¹⁸

The suggestion that most whites encouraged racial fluidity in Jones County before and during the war seems exaggerated. Still, reporters accurately revealed that the majority of whites were determined to terminate their marginalized status that the rebellion produced and to salvage their southern identity by becoming the epitome of the southerner, which in part meant devotion to the Lost Cause, white supremacy, and domination over blacks through violence. Once whites tamed the frontier, they tamed too its people. To destroy any lasting legacy of the Free State of Jones, elite whites tried to change the name of their county to Jefferson Davis after the Confederate president, but the Reconstruction government stymied their efforts. To terminate Yankee rule over their

¹⁸ Quoting "Atrocities by White Men—A Live Negro Skinned," article originally from the *Meridian Mercury*, reprinted in *Ralls County (MO) Record*, April 30, 1868. C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960, 3rd. ed., 1993), 76-78; Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 138-142, 157-166; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 131-135, 150-151.

counties, and to conform all heretics of white supremacy to the southern racial order, the white patriarchs used spontaneous lynchings like that of the accused black rapist and organized violence as perpetuated by the local Klan.

Although the Ku Klux Klan was founded in 1865 in Tennessee as a social group, its first Grand Wizard, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, transformed it into a southern paramilitary organization bent on eradicating Republican rule and subjugating blacks. Since the Central Piney Woods had a relatively small black population, the Klan never centered its activities in the area. Still, it appears that many more Klan attacks occurred than histories have recorded. During the Redemption era, a Klansman from Jones County, William B. Martin, boasted that he and his brethren terrorized the “niggers” and hanged so many blacks that they saved whites from the reign of Yankees and “Negroes.” Republicans initially struggled to protect the black population and to quash the violence through the passage of several civil rights acts. However, they abandoned blacks in the infamous Compromise of 1877: in exchange for the Republican agreement to end Reconstruction, southern Democrats conceded the contested 1876 presidential election to Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. Former Confederate Colonel Lowry, who had executed many of Knights’ soldiers, became governor of Mississippi in 1882 in a zealous race-baiting campaign. In the ashes of Reconstruction arose the white Leviathan and its tyranny of racial absolutism.¹⁹

¹⁹ Quoting, “Gov. Lowry’s Clemency,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1885. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1987), 2, 8-14. Bynum, *Free State of Jones*, 135-136, 140-144; “Atrocities by White Men—A Live Negro Skinned,” *Ralls County (MO) Record*, April 30, 1868; Addie West, “Assignment #22: Reconstruction,” November 4, 1937, WPA Files, Jones County, Reel 2870; Petition from Jones County Citizens to the Senate and House of Representatives, October 16, 1865, Record Group 47, vol. 88,

Leviathan rushed into the Central Piney Woods on the railroads. The trains terminated its geographical isolation from the rest of the state which caused an explosion in population, a revolution in economics, and a surge in the power and reach of the white ruling class. In 1882 a lumberman and civil engineer, Captain William H. Hardy, initiated the historic shift when he established a way station for the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad in the Gordonville settlement in an area originally belonging to Perry County, which would later become Forrest County. He named the town Hattiesburg after his wife, Hattie. By 1884, workers constructed the first rail through Hattiesburg to New Orleans via Meridian, and over the next few decades they built rail lines to Jackson, Natchez, Gulfport, and Mobile, rendering the town the “railroad center,” soon known as the “Hub” city of South Mississippi. Neighboring Jones County also flourished as rail lines from Hattiesburg ran through Ellisville and Laurel. In 1902 Laurel became the town shipping more lumber than any other city in the world until Hattiesburg surpassed it eight years later. The state of nature existence receded quickly as moguls seized virgin terrain; lumberjacks cleared forests at record rates; laborers transformed raw materials into products and shipped them on trains to the market; speculators sold property to the constant flood of migrants; merchants opened storefronts in towns carved out of the

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MDAH]; Civil Rights Act of 1866, April 9, 1866, Civil Rights Act of 1871, April 20, 1871, *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November 1984, 11-14, in John C. Stennis Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Stennis Collection]; William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 446; Vernon Lane Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890*, in North Carolina Historical Society, *James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science*, vol. 28 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 230-231; Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 170-182; Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 244-247.

woodlands; and the Redeemers with evangelical zeal purged the landscape of racial heretics.²⁰

Wealthy white families like the Chisolms, the Rogers, the Gardiners, and the Tatums dominated the commercial worlds that emerged in the budding towns just beyond the mills, gins, and manufacturing plants. In Jones County, the older town of Ellisville eventually paled in comparison to Laurel. As in Ellisville, Laurel's courthouse, a Grecian/Romanesque structure made of clay colored bricks stood like a sentry, lording over the storefronts emerging around it. The true center of power lay with Laurel's moguls and professionals who built their Georgian, Grecian, and Italian Renaissance mansions upward from the courthouse on the sloping hills of Fifth and Sixth Avenues where lines of oak trees formed canopies over the streets. Hattiesburg tycoons founded their downtown just beyond the industry bordering the rails. They carved out a charming and vivacious commercial district on the lowest terrace ridge of the Leaf River. Entrepreneurs and professionals rushed to open their offices, boutiques, haberdasheries, cafes, and hotels in red brick buildings that blended the diverse architectural styles of Victorian, Italian Renaissance, and Colonial Revival into a classical New South town. Trolley cars transported citizens from the residential areas encircling downtown to the

²⁰ First quote, "The Hattiesburg Story," The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce promotion booklet, n. d., 1, The Commercial Club of Hattiesburg, "Hattiesburg, District of Southern Mississippi: Agricultural & Industrial Progress," (Hattiesburg, Mississippi: The Hattiesburg News, n. d.), 9, 17, both in HACCR; second quote, "Thousands Thrilled When Slogan Sign Stands Illuminated Against Sky," *Hattiesburg News*, November 29, 1912. Skates, "Hattiesburg: The Early Years," 5, 10; Evie Irby, Addie West, Viola Till, "Assignment #20: Industry," June 15, 1937, WPA Jones County, Reel 2870; Marda Burton, "Two Centennial Towns: Laurel & Hattiesburg," *Mississippi Magazine*, November/December 1990, Laurel 1990 Vertical File, McCain, USM; Marda Burton, "From Mills to Mall, A History," *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1982, Laurel History Founding Vertical File, LRM.

hub, and mule drawn buggies delivered people from the country to town on Saturday for the market.²¹ Although blacks partook and many profited from the economic successes of these rising towns, they suffered under a racist police state in which they lacked basic political, legal, and citizenship rights to protect their lives and property.

As white supremacists rose to power in the Redemption era, they established the Hobbesian Leviathan—a white supremacist tyranny—or as it is more commonly known, the age of Jim Crow. The Redeemers built the political and legal foundations of their tyranny in the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 and through state legislation. They disfranchised blacks with the poll tax and registration exams which white clerks administered in a discriminatory manner, and they passed laws which segregated schools and public transportation, and forbade miscegenation. The federal government abetted black subjugation as U. S. Supreme Court rulings beginning with the *Slaughter Houses Cases* (1873) so weakened the coverage of the Fourteenth Amendment’s privilege and immunities and equal protection clauses that it divested blacks of federal protection. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) delivered the final blow: the justices ruled segregation constitutional as long as separate was equal. White patriarchs ensured that separate would

²¹ Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 224; Marda Burton, “Laurel is a Treasure Trove of Architecture and Art,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 15, 1985; Guy M. Walker, “Why I Went South: How Great Is the Advantage?” *Manufacturers Record*, February 9, 1928, 8, both in Laurel History Founding Vertical File, LRM. Cecil R. Boots Jordan, “Ellisville in the Roaring Twenties and the Terrible Twenties,” unpublished manuscript, August 2000, Ellisville Public Library, Ellisville, Mississippi; Ervie Irby, Doris Hunter, and Addie West, Assignment # 16, January 5, 1937, WPA Files, Jones County, Reel 2870. Department of Planning and Community Development, *Historic Hattiesburg: The History & Architecture of Hattiesburg’s First Neighborhoods*, and Koch and Wilson Architects, “1991 Hattiesburg Survey North Main Newman/Buschman Mobile Street,” June 30, 1991, 20-25, the Hattiesburg Department of Urban Development Historic Preservation Planner Collection; Synopsis of Report of Secretary of the Commercial Club, Hattiesburg, Miss, February 1, 1910, HACCR, all in McCain, USM.

never be equal. Whites used segregation to separate and “subordinate” blacks and to dehumanize them through the constant public display of the racial hierarchy in daily rituals. In shared public spaces, Jim Crow restricted blacks to the inferior areas designated with the signs “whites” and “colored.” Moreover, blacks had to enter white homes through the backdoor, step off the sidewalk to let whites pass, acquire service in public places only after all whites were served, and respond to white reprimands and even physical assaults like dutiful and docile children. Whites perceived deviations from this deferential dance as a threat to white supremacist power.²²

Statutes and customs established Jim Crow, but only violence, particularly mob lynchings forced black subjugation. As McMillen argues in *Dark Journey*, whites remained “the dominant race” through the law when “possible” and through extralegal means when “necessary.” Between the 1880s and the 1940s, Mississippians lynched more than 570 blacks, and many lynchings occurred in Hattiesburg. In the early 1900s, the Laurel newspaper declared that Hattiesburg was the town most famous for “nigger lynchings.” It even had a legendary landscape for such killings as whites lynched many blacks on Richburg Hill. Of course, Jones County whites were also quick to lynch blacks

²² Quoting McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 11, 23-25; *Ibid.*, 7-14, 35, 42-44; Civil Rights Segregation Laws in Mississippi, Stennis Collection; James Silver, *The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1963), 6; Leon Litwack *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 179-216; *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896); *Slaughter Houses Cases* 83 U.S. 36 (1873); *United States v. Reese* 92 US 214 (1876), and *United States v. Cruikshank* 92 US 542 (1876), *Civil Rights Cases* 109 U.S. 3 (1883); *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898) 170 U.S. 213 (1898); Civil Rights Segregation Laws in Mississippi, Stennis Collection; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008, MOHP recording.

they deemed a threat, and some even murdered blacks for the sheer pleasure they found in hunting persons they considered sub-human.²³

During the 1880s, drunk and in search of amusement, Klansman William B. Martin hunted a young black boy and hanged him for sport. Since the black youth had not committed a crime or posed a threat to anyone, the local court in Jones County convicted Martin and sentenced him to death. Shocked, Martin demanded that Governor Lowry pardon him. Surely, Martin insisted, the governor must recall his faithful service to the Democratic Party when he and his Klan brethren, armed with “bullwhips” and “hemp,” eradicated Mississippi of “the rule of the Negro and the carpetbagger.” The frightened whites applauded him in those days when he hanged many “negroes.” Yet now, they

²³ First, second and third quotes, McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 35, 44, *Ibid.*, 42-44; fourth quote, Editorial, *The Laurel Chronicle*, October 14, 1905. For records of lynchings, see Elizabeth Hines and Eliza Steelwater, Project Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project, <http://usersbestweb.bestweb.net/~rg/lyncihgs/Mississippi%20Lynchings.htm> (accessed March 2008), [hereinafter cited as HAL Project Lynching Data]. To see lynch victims by city and county, see The National Lists, *The Lynching Century*. As states failed to keep an accurate data of lynchings, all records are incomplete. For many of the lynchings and attempted lynchings that occurred in the Central Piney Woods, see “Lynching of Tom Johnson,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 27, 1895; “Mob Came Near Lynching Negro Innocent of Crime,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 13, 1902; “One Bullet Kills Three,” *Special to The New York Times*, July 8, 1907; “Troops Hurried to the Scene,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 18, 1905; and “Dragged Negro to Death: Mississippi Mob Breaks Into Prison and Lynches Man,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 1903; “Mob Clamors for Negro,” *Special to The New York Times*, June 23, 1901; “A Secret Lynching,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 1906, all in New York Times Article Archive, [hereinafter cited as NYT Article Archive]. For whitecapping and its impact on lynchings in the area, see, William F. Holmes, “Whitecapping: Agrarian Violence in Mississippi, 1902-1906,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 35 (May, 1969): 165-169; “Mississippi Labor Famine: Lynching Responsible for Unwillingness of Negroes to Work in Field,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1904, NYT Article Archive. For stories of lynchings handed down in black families, see, Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008; Clarence Magee, interview, September 25, 2008; Douglass T. Baker, interview, September 24, 2008; Cheryl Outlaw, interview, October 2, 2008, all by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. See too, Larry McGill, interview.

wanted to execute him for the hanging of just one “nigger”? Martin’s wealthy relatives sent money and a petition signed by 1,870 residents demanding a pardon. On August 24, 1885, Governor Lowry commuted Martin’s sentence to life imprisonment. As the governor declared, he refused to set a precedent in which the justice system would hang a white man for the mere killing of a “nigger.”²⁴

The local white support of Klansmen like Martin proved the norm rather than an anomaly in the Central Piney Woods. After Martin’s case, Jones County courts never again convicted a white person for lynching an African American. Most whites viewed Klansmen and mob leaders as heroes because they, along with the rising white ruling class, obliterated racial heresies harvested during the frontier, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Nothing inspired more public outrage or excuse for lynchings in the Central Piney Woods than black male violations of the sexual color line. Whites so often spun a myth of black men as “beast-rapist[s]” who scoured the land to ravish white women that the mythical caricature became the heart of white southern lore. Many white men feared that white females would welcome black male advances. Consequently, whites often accused blacks of “assault” or “attempted rape” when blacks violated the unwritten laws of the gender/racial caste order which prohibited black men from meeting a white woman’s eyes or making any sort of gesture or facial expression that would suggest flirtation. Forrest County whites lynched George Stevenson in 1890 for attempted rape, Henry Novels in 1899 for an alleged assault, and William Oatis in 1899 for an alleged “indecent proposal to a girl.” In 1895 Jones County whites lynched Samuel

²⁴ First quotation, “Respited by Gov. Lowry,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1885; rest of quotations, “Gov. Lowry’s Clemency,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1885, both in NYT Article Archive. For Robert Lowry’s background, see Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 117-126, 131-132, 144.

Wilson and Forrest County whites lynched Tom Johnson for allegedly committing rape and murder. The raucous culture throughout the entire Piney Woods region encouraged malevolent eruptions of lynchings which consistently attracted larger mobs than in any other Mississippi region. During Johnson's ordeal, the mob selected a committee to hold a makeshift trial led by a judge in front of the massive posse. The committee lynched Johnson by firing squad before 1,000 townspeople.²⁵

Mississippi authorities occasionally tried to prevent lynchings, but they refused to punish whites who successfully lynched blacks. The state, through collusion, tacit consent, and/or apathy, sanctioned black lynchings. Whites so universally accepted the stock characters of the black beast mythology in their Manichean Mississippi that an accused black was forced into the caricature of the beastly villain deserving of a brutal death at the hands of lawmen, judges, or the mob who assumed the role of chivalrous heroes delivering justice. Most whites could never imagine the roles might be reversed. When blacks actually received their right to a trial, segregation and disfranchisement rendered them condemned, for they faced an all-white jury, a white judge, a white prosecutor, and reluctant white defense attorneys usually disinterested in proving their innocence. Blacks stood alone in the courtroom, their family and friends consigned to the

²⁵ Last quote, Hal Project Lynching Data. All other quotes, McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 235-236; *Ibid.*, 202-203, 208-223; 236-240. Litwack *Trouble in Mind*, 61, 247-270, 294-296, 299-305; Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 302; Terence Robert Finegan, "At the Hands of Parties Unknown: Lynching in Mississippi And South Carolina, 1881-1930," (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1993), 281-282; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 155; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 150-151. Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Lynchings in the United States*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 78-82, 117-122; "Negro Lynched in Mississippi," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 26, 1899; "Negro Was Tied to a Tree and Shot," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1899, NYT Article Archive; Henry Nowark, The National Lists, *The Lynching Century*.

balcony, making them nearly invisible to the white crowds seated below. If their crime involved a white victim, white mobs often infested the courtroom. If blacks survived until a trial, the affair was a charade. Mostly blacks faced lynch mobs because lynching controlled and dehumanized blacks. It delivered the message that civilized trials were the domain of whites while blacks were savagely disposed of like rabid animals in the wilds.²⁶

Whites ensured the perpetuation of the white supremacist tyranny through pervasive indoctrination of their progeny in their churches, schools, cultural centers, and through public lynchings. The white supremacist creed that crystallized during Jim Crow undergirded white arguments for the oppression of blacks and encouraged racial terrorism. Redeemers espoused Teutonic myths and Anglo-Saxon scientific racism that espoused the historical and biological superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks. Preachers perverted biblical passages to argue that slavery had reigned in the natural animalistic behavior of blacks, but emancipation unleashed the black beast causing the chaotic racial horrors of Reconstruction, which they falsely claimed included black rule, federal tyranny, and the epidemic black rape of white women. Although the Central Piney Woods never had much of a plantation history, the white patriarchs tied their towns to the racial hierarchy of the Old South with celebrations of the Confederacy and its most virulently racist leaders. In 1908, when the patriarchs of Hattiesburg seceded from Perry County and created a new county, they named it Forrest after Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general and the Klan's first Grand Wizard. Celebrations of the Confederacy

²⁶ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 247-270; 294-296, 299-305; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 150-151; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 202-253; "Paid the Penalty," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 9, 1896; "For Assault Negro Hangs," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 2, 1902.

solidified whites across class lines because it glorified white rule and spread nostalgia for the Old South. Lynchings became the most powerful celebration of white tyranny in the New South. They, too, solidified whites across class lines and perpetuated Leviathan as it inured children to racial violence.²⁷

The racial police state became so pervasive that within the confines of the white tyranny, blacks could publicly accommodate to the racial order, join the black exodus from the state, or accept certain death in their rebellions against their oppressors. Most blacks accommodated, but rather than becoming passive victims of their times, they served as important agents of history. Many African Americans subscribed to the doctrine of Booker T. Washington, the president of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, who urged blacks to use segregation to cement black cohesiveness, practice black capitalism, and embrace black education, all of which would allow them to achieve prosperity and eventually liberty. Blacks in the Central Piney Woods had more opportunity than most Mississippians to practice Washington's principles. Throughout Mississippi, white elites prevented blacks from achieving socioeconomic advancement by keeping them bound to the land, planting and harvesting cotton that white men manufactured. In contrast, the dearth of laborers in the Central Piney Woods forced

²⁷ George R. Watson, "Historical Hattiesburg," 1974, City documents (1884-1960), Hattiesburg Municipal Records, A-17, Reel #113, McCain, USM; David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 2-3; Francis Thornton Smith, interview by Karen Cox, February 14, 1996, MOHP Digital; Madge Hoskins Holmes biography and newspaper clippings, Daughters of the Confederacy Collection, McCain, USM; Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 10-22. Reginald Horseman, "Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism," *Critical White Studies*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 139-144; Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 23; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1968), 17-19, 35-36, 84, 111, 158, 201, 243, 306-308, 548.

lumber and railroad industries to recruit blacks from across the South with decent wages. Early lumber barons, like Eastman Gardiner in Laurel and W. F. S. Tatum in Hattiesburg, recruited so many black laborers that they dominated the hard labor workforce. The barons also built company towns that provided their workers with homes, schools, and commissaries. Of course, whites held the supervisory positions, and the company towns maintained separate “colored” and “white” “quarters” with whites granted superior facilities. Despite the racial disparities, blacks received higher salaries and enjoyed better living conditions than their sharecropper counterparts. The average black lumber worker made five times as much as the Delta sharecropper, and companies often sold cleared tracts of land to their employees, even to black employees who developed small farms.²⁸

Blacks, particularly the mixed-race Kellys and Knights, enjoyed a significant presence on the farms spreading out from the rails deep into the countryside of the Central Piney Woods. As of 1870, Knight had built two homes on a 170 acre farm in Jones County where he had relocated his wife Serena and their white children as well as Rachel and her mixed-race children, some of whom Knight fathered. As the racial boundaries hardened during the white resistance to Reconstruction, the white community increasingly treated the Knights with disdain. In 1870 leaders of the local school that Knight helped build refused to allow Rachel’s mixed-race children to attend. The school burned to the ground the next day. After Rachel died in 1889, Knight separated from

²⁸ Quoting Hulon Myers, interview, vol. 349, 27, MOHP; *Ibid.*, 16-23, 27-28, 38-39; “Assignment #10,” n. d., WPA Files, Jones County, Reel 2870; Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, 213-214; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 8-13, 178-179; “Hattiesburg Beginnings: A Black Perspective,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 2, 1980, Myrtis Rue Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as “Hattiesburg Beginnings;” Rue Collection]; Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community, 1882-1962*, 17-37.

Serena and moved into a home with one of Rachel's daughter, Georgeanne, with whom he had several children. Whites considered whites who lived among persons of any black heritage, black. Thus, when some of Knight's white children married Rachel's mixed-race children, they were classified as blacks and divested of the privileges accompanying "whiteness." In response, many of the Knights tried to lighten the skin of future generations by marrying their light-skinned cousins or marrying into the Indian/white/black Musgrove families who lived near the Knights. Some of the light-skinned Knights left Jones County and passed as whites in other states. Other Knights later claimed that their darker pigment came from Serena, whom they described as an Indian, and they tried to erase Rachel from their heritage. The Knight clan, barred from white society, but refusing to fully join black society, became, as sociologist Franklin Frazier termed it, a "racial island," a land of mixed racial peoples who isolated themselves from the binary black and white worlds around them. One reporter in Laurel noted: "the Knight world existed as an island, and there were no visas to the rest of the world. Not for business, not pleasure, not for school."²⁹

²⁹ First quote, Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 165; *Ibid.*, 144-176, 182-183, 205-206; second quote, Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1951), 164; third quote, Lonnie Wheeler, "Knight Legend Lives On In Mulatto Offspring," *The Clarion-Ledger*, October 6, 1977, Newton Knight Descendants Vertical File, LRM. *State of Mississippi v. Davis Knight* (1948), case no. 646, transcript, 35-36, 87-92, Mississippi Supreme Court Records, MDAH; Victoria Bynum, "'White Negroes' in Segregated Mississippi: Miscegenation, Racial Identity, and the Law," *The Journal of Southern History*, 64 (May, 1998): 256-265; Addie West, "Martha Wheeler: Reminiscence of an Old Slave," supplement, ser. I, vol. 10, Mississippi Narratives, Pt. 5, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, ed. George P. Rawick, Jan Hillegas, Ken Lawrence (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972); Commercial Club Synopsis, 19-46, HACCR, McCain, USM; "Agriculture," WPA Files, Forrest County, Reel 2857; Evie Irby, Ruthe Bethea, Dorris Hunter, "Assignment #17," WPA Files, Jones County, Reel 2870; Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording.

Unlike the Knights, the mixed-race families in the Kelly Settlement located on the Forrest/Jones County line, proudly defined themselves as black. After the Civil War, the Kelly Settlement became a refuge for people of various racial heritages and skin hues, including two white women, Henrietta McComb and Laura Barnes, and their mixed-race families. Henrietta, a white baby born out of wedlock to a white girl, was given to a black family, the McCombs, who resided in the Kelly Settlement. Henrietta married Warren Kelly, Sarah's mulatto son by John. They had 11 children, including Ellen. Around the same time, 14-year-old Laura became pregnant out of wedlock by a white traveling salesman, Peter Dahmer. Laura's humiliated parents sent her to live in Covington County with the Barnes, a black family. Laura married a former slave, Charlie Craft, and they raised Laura's white child, George Dahmer, and their 10 mixed-race children together in the Kelly Settlement. George married Ellen McComb and raised their 12 light-skinned children, including Vernon F. Dahmer in the Kelly Settlement on a 340 acre farm. Although George was white and many of his mixed racial children appeared white, as racial categorizations hardened, the census identified the Dahmers as mulattos and later as "Negro[es]." Most of George and Ellen's children left Mississippi for the North when they reached adulthood, and many of them passed as white persons. Yet Vernon Dahmer embraced his black identity and stayed in the Kelly Settlement. He subscribed to his father's philosophy: "When you own where you stay, you are secure. Nobody can starve you to death 'cause you can always make a living from dirt."³⁰

³⁰ Quoting Jerry Mitchell, "Legacy of Caring," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 18, 1994. Census records, 1910, *Beat 2, Forrest, Mississippi*: Roll T624-739; 18A; Enumeration District 15; image: 314 and census records, 1920, *Beat 2, Forrest, Mississippi*: Roll T625-875; 17B; Enumeration District 15; image: 317, and census record 1930, *Beat 2, Forrest, Mississippi*; Roll: 1145; 3B; Enumeration District: 10; Image:

For the mixed race Dahmers and the Knights, farming provided a refuge, though a tenuous one, from the Jim Crow world. As owners of their land, they were not subject to a white boss or a landlord and they could reinvest and save all the profits of their endeavors. Still, they had to rely on white-owned mills and brokers to refine and purchase their crops at fair prices and white-owned banks to provide them with loans to finance their operations. And they had to tread cautiously when they entered those white worlds, for they dared not offend a white person and invite white wrath into their refuges. They had achieved some autonomy on their lands located in predominantly black and mixed racial worlds, yet they could not fully escape the larger Jim Crow landscape that circumscribed their lives.³¹

Blacks working as domestics or laboring in the industries bordering the rails in Laurel, Ellisville, and Hattiesburg lived more directly under the confines of Jim Crow. Still, many blacks flocked to work in the saw and brick mills; animal feed and fertilizer plants; cotton mills, gins, compresses and storehouses; and bottling plants and turpentine stills because these jobs offered them better lives than sharecropping. Domestics had to rely on the paternalism of their bosses to live decently. The white patriarchs hired blacks

448.0; and Chas Craft and Laura Craft, 1900; Census Place: *Beat 2, Perry, Mississippi*; Roll: T623 824; 2B; George W. Dahmer, Year: 1910, *Beat 2, Forrest, Mississippi*; Roll: T624-739; Enumeration District: 15, Image: 314, all on *1910 United States Federal Census, 1920 United States Federal Census, and 1930 United States Federal Census* respectively [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2006, *Ancestry.com*. Ruth Bates, *Before There Was a Mississippi*, 19-26, 30; Iola Williams, Craft Family—Generation I, Generation II-D and Kelley Family—Generation II, in *The Family of Charles and Laura Craft*; Iola Williams, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), November 6, 2006, MOHP recording.

³¹ Vernon Dahmer, Jr., interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 2, 2001, and Kerry Fielder, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 4, 2001, both MOHP recordings; Ellie Dahmer, interview by Orley B. Caudill, July 2, 1974, MOHP Digital.

as cooks, nannies, maids, gardeners, and drivers. In Laurel, the patriarchs built a black neighborhood on Fourth Avenue for their servants so they could walk to work to the mansions of their bosses on Fifth and Sixth Avenues. They welcomed their servants' children into their homes and allowed them to play with their children until they reached puberty when fears of miscegenation led them to strictly enforce the color line.³²

Many of these moguls of the New South, like the plantation owners of the Old South, assumed paternal and maternal roles. They aided their servants if they needed loans, health services, or jobs for their children, and they vouched for their character and helped them avoid problems with other whites. The strange relationship fostered both intimacy and resentment. Like many African Americans born in the first generation after slavery, Isabella Marsh migrated to Jones County from an Alabama plantation in search of work and grand dreams. She married a sawmill worker in Laurel with whom she had a daughter, and she became a nursemaid for one of Laurel's wealthiest families—the Chisolms. Like most of the mogul's domestics, Marsh was light-skinned and resided with her family in a shotgun house paid for by her boss in the black quarters on Fourth Avenue. A few years after Marsh's husband died, she married John T. Jones, a janitor, and in 1922 she bore him a son James. When James was just a newborn, Marsh began working as a maid for the curator of the Lauren Rogers Museum. As a child, James often accompanied his mother to work. He spent hours walking through the museum and gazing at the paintings from famous artists as he wondered of their far away homelands

³² Commercial Club Synopsis, HACCR, McCain, USM; Skates, "Hattiesburg: The Early Years," 10-11; Evie Irby, Addie West, Viola Till, Assignment #20," WPA File, Jones County, Reel 2870; Marda Burton, "From Mills to Mall, A History," *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1982, Laurel History Founding Vertical File, LRM; Cecil R. Boots Jordan, "Ellisville in the Roaring and the Terrible Twenties"; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008.

and dreamed of visiting such places someday. As he grew older and began working as a houseboy in the homes of other wealthy whites, he dreamed of acquiring an education like their children and of becoming a wealthy lawyer. He was too young yet to fully understand that he lived in a white supremacist world and that his white bosses expected that he would spend his life in servitude to whites. As a child, he mistook white paternalism for respect.³³

Still, as Jones grew up, economic opportunities burgeoned for blacks as the twin developments of Jim Crow and the economic revolution facilitated the creation of a black middle class. Blacks with entrepreneurial spirits and professional backgrounds soon found that segregation ironically offered them opportunities for economic advancement. Since Jim Crow's rigid rules of segregation often prevented blacks from acquiring many of their needs and desires in white institutions and companies, black professionals and entrepreneurs capitalized on the void by establishing their own institutions and opening their own businesses. The most vibrant section of black Hattiesburg, the Mobile-Bouie community, emerged between 1895 and 1910. Nestled in the northeast corner of the city between the Bouie River, the commercial and manufacturing area, and the railroad depot, it became the heart of black Hattiesburg. Soon, businesses lined its main artery, Mobile Street, from the river to the depot, and homes sprung up all around it. The community abounded with southern charm—its businesses and homes a delightful amalgamation of the National Folk, Queen Anne, Folk Victorian cottage style or the Colonial Revival and Craftsman Bungalow design. Although a few white-owned businesses and manufacturing plants dotted the area, black entrepreneurs dominated the scene. Over the next half

³³ James Jones, interviews by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008, June 9, 2009, MOHP recordings.

century, blacks opened beauty salons, barber shops, cafes, motels, a cab company, insurance businesses, pharmacies, a dentistry, funeral homes, billiard rooms, juke joints, and even brothels. Love's Dance Hall was a popular stop for famous blues and jazz musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Muddy Waters, and Ray Charles. As blacks had access to higher paying jobs in the Central Piney Woods than in most regions of Mississippi, black entrepreneurs and professionals had a larger pool of black customers, clients, and patients to keep their businesses and practices afloat. Black money generally stayed in black businesses, which produced a "black Wall Street." Blacks created microcosms of Mobile Street in other black communities, including East Jerusalem and Palmers Crossing.³⁴

Blacks in Jones County experienced a similar economic trend at the turn of the century. In Laurel, on the black side of the railroad line that divided black and white residences, blacks opened barber shops, taxi stands, dry good stores, cafes, hotels, and funeral homes on Front Street, which became the Mecca of black Laurel, and they soon became known as the "Front Street Establishment." Between 1916 and 1928, black businesses experienced a "golden period" as a black middle class emerged. The flurry of new establishments proliferated over the next several decades, and blacks opened business in other black communities, including the KC Bottom, Kingston, Queensburg,

³⁴ Quoting Natasha Smith, "Mobile Street Memories," *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 2006. "Hattiesburg Beginnings," Rue Collection; Department of Planning and Community Development, *Historic Hattiesburg*; Koch and Wilson, "1991 Hattiesburg Survey"; Arvarh E. Strickland, "Growing Up Black in Wartime Mississippi," 149-150, *Remaking Dixie*; Iola Williams, interview by Brad Kavan, August 26, 2004, MOHP recording; Janet Braswell, "East Jerusalem Neighborhood Built on Pride, Community Spirit," *Hattiesburg American*, February 19, 2006; Nikki Davis Maute, "Black Celebrities," *Hattiesburg American*, February 12, 2006; Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 29, 2008, MOHP recording.

Southside, Harvest Quarters, and Warren Quarters. Some African Americans migrated to Laurel to work in the saw mills and saved their earnings to open businesses. Others arrived in town fortified with an education and grand expectations. Benjamin Murph, who later became a significant civil rights leader, and George Peterson, both graduates of Meharry Medical College, opened a dentistry and pharmacy respectively.³⁵

Leaders of the rising black middle class in Laurel and Hattiesburg devoted themselves to providing an education to black residents as they hoped to perpetuate black prosperity. Segregation provided opportunities for black educators because it created two separate school systems which required hiring black administrators and teachers. As blacks in the towns had to rely on white paternalism to acquire educational funding, they employed Booker T. Washington's accommodation tactics to convince whites that education would deter black crime and inculcate a proper work ethic in black children. During the early 1900s in Laurel, whites donated a hall for a black school. In Hattiesburg, several black leaders convinced whites to supply them with funds to build a two-room school house. The mixed racial communities in the Central Piney Woods founded and funded their own schools. In 1898 Anna Knight opened a schoolhouse with the help of the community. Men cut down trees and built the school while women and children helped Knight cultivate cotton on her land, which she subsequently sold to fund the construction of the school and school supplies. In 1880 Warren Kelly donated two acres of his land in the Kelly Settlement for a school. With the help of relatives, Kelly built a one-room log cabin schoolhouse that became Bay Springs School. Blacks, through white

³⁵ Quoting Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community*, 36; *Ibid.*, 25-37, 89, 112. Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009, MOHP recording; "Laurel Schools Force to Start Mixing Classes," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 17, 1977.

paternalism and black fund-raising, also built churches and hired preachers. A historian and former resident of the Mobile-Bouie community, Arvarh E. Strickland, recalled that the churches stood “as seemingly unheeded sentinels watching over Mobile Street.” Another resident noted that the black church provided the community with a “source of cultural strength and solace.” Blacks often needed solace in the violent Jim Crow landscape.³⁶

During the turn of the century, whites had, as they perceived it, redeemed the South from the threat of integration and the reversal of racial power by establishing a white supremacist tyranny. Betrayed by the North and obliterated by the South, the black freedom struggle had ended in tragedy. Yet the story had not concluded. While one trilogy ended, another began. Abandoned by the federal government after the failure of Reconstruction, blacks accommodated to the racial police state, but they never surrendered their dreams of liberty. Jim Crow sensibilities opened the space for blacks to carve out spiritual, intellectual, and economic refuges because they buttressed the boundaries between black and white worlds. Blacks accommodated publicly to the racial police state, but privately they defied their oppression by using Washington’s doctrine to prepare their progeny for that more precipitous day in the future when blacks could

³⁶ Quoting “Hattiesburg Beginnings;” Rue Collection; second quote, Arvarh Strickland, “Growing Up Black in Wartime Mississippi,” 150. Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community*, 65-66, 172, 72-73; Koch and Wilson, “1991 Hattiesburg Survey,” 20-25; Bates, *Before There Was a Mississippi*, 19-20, 35-37, 40-44; Payne, *The Oak Park Story*, 9; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 163-164, 167; Anna Knight, *Mississippi Girl: An Autobiography* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), 79-83. Constance Baker, interview by Kim Adams, April 3, 1995; Ariel Barnes, interview by Priscilla Walker, January 6, 1995; Ariel Barnes, interview by Sarah Rowe, April 1, 1993; Oseola McCarty, interview by Shana Walton, February 22, 1996, all in MOHP Digital.

launch a successful revolt.³⁷ They had to be patient again. Even during eras of relative racial harmony, the threat of racial terror lay just beneath the surface. When shifts on the national and international stage, including the World Wars and the Depression spurred racial liberalism in the North, white violence spiraled out of control in the South. Yet those progressive changes also renewed black hope, and a new black freedom struggle was born.

³⁷ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 8-13, 10, 178-179; Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Radford, Virginia: Wilder Publications, 1901, Reprinted 2008); Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community*, 17-37; “Hattiesburg Beginnings,” Rue Collection; Johnny Magee, interview; Arthur Siggers, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording.

PART I:

WHITE LEVIATHAN:
STATE OF TYRANNY, 1940-1963

“This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN . . . he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him that, by terror thereof, he is enabled to form the wills of them all to peace at home, and mutual aid against their enemies abroad.”¹

—Thomas Hobbes

“Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root;
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.”²

—Billy Holiday

“. . . the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm. We have seen how the government’s agent uses a language of pure violence. The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject.”³

—Frantz Fanon

¹ Thomas Hobbes, “Leviathan,” in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 650.

² Billy Holiday, “Strange Fruit,” *Billy Holiday: Star Power*, Direct South Special Products, Inc. PST 14572.

³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 4.

CHAPTER I:

HERESIES: WORLD WAR II AND THE DOUBLE “V” CAMPAIGN

Near midnight on October 16, 1942, around 100 white men, armed with guns and axes, converged on the Jones County jail. They surrounded Sheriff J. Press Reddoch and Deputies Louis Welch and I. O. Fowler. The men intended to lynch Howard Wash, a black man sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his white boss, Clint Welborn. The Sheriff aimed his rifle at the center of the mob and ordered the men to disperse. Undaunted, they swarmed toward him; one man yelled, “We want that d[amn] nigger.” The Sheriff responded: “I’ll die before I’ll give you the keys.” Someone in the crowd shouted that his death could be arranged. After a 30-minute stand-off, one man implored Sheriff Reddoch to surrender his gun so they could discuss the situation like gentlemen. Reddoch reluctantly agreed. When he handed his rifle to his deputy, several men dragged him out of the way to allow others to rush the jailhouse.¹

Inside the colored cellblock, inmates awoke to the sounds of boisterous voices and the footfall of men running up the stairs. The black prisoners bolted upright in their beds when the door to their cellblock flew open. In the darkness, the prisoners saw only vague shapes, but they recognized the voice of jailer Luther Holder: “None of you boys get up. Lay still. Get ready Wash. They have come after you.” Inmate Lonnie McNair saw two men approach Wash’s cage, a short stocky man and a tall man he had noticed visiting the colored cellblock earlier that day. Wash’s cellmate, Harvey Ball lay perfectly

¹ Quoting Louis L. Welch, statement, n. d., Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, Howard Wash FBI File, #44-661-5, 11, Federal Bureau of Investigation Central Records System, Washington D. C., copy in author’s possession, [hereinafter cited as Wash FBI File]; *Ibid.*, 10; “State Troopers Placed on Guard After Negro Howard Wash Taken From Jail and Lynched,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 1942.

still as the men shined flashlights on their cell. Wash had expected a mob. He rose and began dressing. They told him he would not need clothes where he was going. Are you sorry for your crime? Wash responded that he was, but that he “had to do it.” The men refused to allow Wash to put on his shoes. Once they yanked him out of the cell, they began beating him. Holder shouted, “Don’t start that up here, wait till you get outdoors.” Wash did not resist as the men dragged him out of the cellblock.²

Outside, the mob released Sheriff Reddoch. He ran toward the police station across the street, but a man brandishing an axe stepped in his path and shouted: “Halt, Don’t come a G—D— step farther.” The sheriff stopped, but as soon as the man left to join the mob, he raced into the police station where his deputies had gathered. He called the jail and ordered the staff to “die” before surrendering the keys. It was too late. He slammed down the phone. The sheriff and his deputies discussed shooting at the mob but decided too much bloodshed would result. Reddoch called Judge Burkitt Collins for help. The judge contacted Governor Paul B. Johnson, Sr., and informed him that a mob had abducted Wash and that the sheriff had lost control of the situation. Johnson immediately dispatched the National Guard and Special Investigator John Byrd to Laurel. The lynching, however, was already in motion. A vehicle transporting Wash sped toward the Welborn property. As Allen Welborn Pryor sat in the backseat behind Wash, he grew “very excited” about the prospect of murdering the black man who had killed his cousin. When they arrived on the Welborn property, Pryor savored the moment as the men fastened the rope around Wash’s neck, secured the other end to Welborn Bridge, and

² First quote, FBI Report, November 4, 1942, Wash FBI File, # 44-661-5, 34; Ibid., 1-2, 32-34; all other quotes, FBI Report, March 30, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-43, 2.

shoved his body over the edge. After a moment, someone said quietly “it is all over.” Several hours later, state troopers found Wash’s lifeless body dangling above the creek.³

In 1942, had America not been embroiled in a war against despotism, the federal government would have ignored the murder of Howard Wash as it had disregarded the lynchings of over 570 blacks in the state since 1880. Since the termination of Reconstruction, the Department of Justice had only intervened in three lynching cases in the South, and none of those investigations occurred in Mississippi. During that time, Congress had debated hundreds of anti-lynching bills, but southern-led filibusters prevented a single one from passing. On the state level, lynchers never expected punishment for their crimes because the rare conviction generally resulted in a minor fine. As Neil McMillen concluded in *Dark Journey* “racial injustice would survive in Mississippi as long as the world’s oldest republic would tolerate it.” During World War II, as America fought against tyranny in Europe and Asia, the republic began to turn against its homegrown racial autocracy.⁴

World War II positioned the racial struggle in the Central Piney Woods on a circuitous, but nevertheless transitional path away from federal apathy and black accommodation and toward federal intervention and racial protest. The war forced America to confront the hypocrisy of attacking tyranny to liberate the oppressed abroad

³ First and second quotes, FBI Report, November 4, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-5, 8; Ibid.,1-9; third and fourth quotes, Allen Welborn Pryor, statement, FBI Report, December 1, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-10, 8; Ibid., 7-9.

⁴ Quoting Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 317. Ibid., 238-251; Michael R. Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 1-15, 122-123; James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 122-123; “Open Lynching Trial of Five In Mississippi,” *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1943.

while permitting the oppression of blacks at home. That confrontation spurred the nation to begin its retreat from white supremacy and introduced a shift in America's political and intellectual environment. The exigencies of a world war also terminated southern isolationism, which in turn set the precedent for federal investigations of racial injustice. Of equal importance, the dichotomy of America's wartime rhetoric stimulated the consciousness of black veterans and citizens toward revolutionary thinking. Because wartime industry created greater economic opportunity for blacks, some blacks acquired a degree of economic independence from local whites, which allowed them more freedom to protest their subjugation. Still, white Mississippians refused to capitulate to the global, national, and local changes. Rather, they fortified their white supremacist tyranny with violence, red-baiting, and legislation designed to sustain the racial order. The white ruling class and their devoted white citizenry stemmed the tide of racial changes, but they could not forever contain the forces of liberty. World War II set the turbulent journey of racial protest in motion and created the first real crisis in Leviathan. The shifts gave hope to black Mississippians: the day for a black revolt seemed near.

That hope began with the return of the federal government to Mississippi's racial landscape. On a national level, the war shook the foundations of American life, and as Gary Gerstle argues in *American Crucible*, it forced citizens to reexamine their divergent creeds of "racial nationalism" and "civic nationalism." The United States portrayed the war in Manichean terms: America assumed the position of moral crusader endowed with the duty and the right to liberate the oppressed from tyranny. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt celebrated America's practice of freedom of speech and religion and its freedom from want and fear. He asserted that "freedom means the supremacy of human

rights everywhere,” and he argued that America’s sons and daughters of all races fought “to uphold the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God.” The Axis’s genocidal extermination of those they considered lesser beings in Europe and Asia gave Roosevelt the authority to criticize. Yet America responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 in virulently racist terms and fought the war with a segregated military. While denouncing Nazi white supremacy, the United States permitted racial discrimination, injustice, and violence to persist at home.⁵

America’s Manichean rhetoric laid the country bare to assaults by the black press, which undermined the nation’s façade of universal liberty. The *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the “Double V war cry—victory over our enemies at home and victory over our enemies on the battlefield.” Editors of the *Pittsburgh Courier* implored black Americans to fight against “our enslavers at home and those abroad who would enslave us,” and they reminded the nation that “WE ARE AMERICANS TOO!” The *Chicago Defender* initiated its dual victory campaign in late January 1942 in response to the brutal lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri. The paper’s slogan “Remember Pearl Harbor and Sikeston Too: The Fight to Save Democracy” beckoned Americans to disprove theories spread in Germany and Japan that “discrimination, segregation and lynching” were “incurable weaknesses of democracy.” Although the federal government investigated the

⁵ First quote, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms,” Franklin Roosevelt’s Annual Address to Congress, Washington D. C., January 6, 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York, website: <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu:8000/od4frees.html>; second quote, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, speech, in Patrick J. Maney, *The Roosevelt Presence: The Life and Legacy of FDR* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 143; third and fourth quote, Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4. *Ibid.*, 191-196, 201-220. For a history of the Rape of Nanking, see Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

Sikeston lynching and presented a federal case, the grand jury refused to issue indictments. Black newspapers also cited the Howard Wash lynching as evidence of persistent racial tyranny. The black media's comparison of Jim Crow to Nazism gave a voice to black suffering and exposed to the world the hypocrisy of American democracy. Many black residents in the Central Piney Woods acquired access to these papers, and the call to fight for black liberty encouraged them.⁶

The war also provided national civil rights organizations with opportunities for publicity. In 1942 a biracial group founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which used nonviolent tactics, such as sit-ins and boycotts, to challenge segregation in the North and the West. The National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) broadened its base and garnered increasing political attention. The NAACP

⁶ First, second, and third quotes, "The Courier's Double 'V' for a Double Victory Campaign Gets Country-Wide Support," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1942; fourth quote, "Remember Pearl Harbor and Sikeston Too!" *Chicago Defender*, March 14, 1942. James G. Thomas, "Should I Sacrifice to Live 'Half American?'" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942; "Logo Double V Campaign," *The Pittsburg Courier*, February 7, 1942; "Freedom Here First," *Chicago Defender*, March 7, 1942; "600 Mobists Burn Victim in School Yard," *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1942. Cleo Wright was accused of raping a white woman in Sikeston, Missouri in late January 1942. Around 600 whites abducted Wright from jail, tied him to the back of a vehicle, and dragged him across town before pouring gasoline over him and burning him alive. For coverage on the Wash lynching, see "Gen. Biddle Opens Probe Lynching," *Chicago Defender*, October 31, 1942; "Mississippi Jury Refuses to Convict," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1943; "Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial," *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943. On the impact of newspapers on Central Piney Woods residents, see James Nix, interview by Sarah Rowe, March 7, 1993 and James Cohen, interview by Mike Garvey, February 2, 1976, both in Oral History Digital Collection, Mississippi Oral History Project, Center for Oral History and Cultural Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter interviews in the digital collection cited as MOHP Digital, recordings in this collection cited as MOHP recording, and printed transcripts in this collection cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited].

supported black activist A. Philip Randolph, who mobilized some 100,000 blacks and threatened to launch a march on Washington in June 1941 unless President Roosevelt abolished all segregation laws in the United States, terminated discrimination in federal and wartime industries, and ensured black suffrage. Concerned about how such a spectacle might affect support for the Allies, Roosevelt compromised with Randolph by creating the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to prevent racial discrimination in federal industries. Widespread noncompliance mitigated the impact of the FEPC; however, the presidential order brought national attention to American racism and provided a foundation on which to build economic equality.⁷

Shifts on the national level began to affect the Central Piney Woods in the fall of 1940, as the United States began reopening old military bases. The reconstruction of Forrest County's Camp Shelby military base into a main training center for the U. S. Army terminated the Central Piney Wood's socioeconomic isolation from the nation. The building necessitated hiring thousands of employees. On September 12, 1940, J. A. Jones

⁷ Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*. 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes & Meir, 1993), 42-48; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 1003-1006; "8 Point Program: March-On-Washington Movement," Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Bilbo Papers]; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 195; Steven F. Lawson, *Running For Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991), 3, 8-13. Lawson notes that the FEPC only fully processed one-third of the 8,000 cases and settled one-fifth of the charges levied against industries in the South. Unions and companies failed to implement 35 of the 45 compliance decrees. Lawson concludes that although blacks achieved some financial gains from the FEPC legislation, they acquired greater economic power from the labor shortage. On a national level black employment surpassed one million; black unemployment fell from 937,000 to 151,000; and black union membership doubled. Blacks acquired work in defense and federal industries as well as in factories that had originally opposed hiring them. Yet blacks still faced discrimination as employers generally restricted them to the lowest paying and lowest ranking jobs. On average, blacks earned half the salaries most whites enjoyed.

Construction from North Carolina received an \$11,000,000 contract to refurbish and rebuild Camp Shelby, and on September 14, the *Hattiesburg American* announced that the superintendent at Shelby needed 5,000 laborers immediately. Workers labored 10-hour shifts 7 days a week to meet the December 1 deadline for completion. One hundred laborers applied for work even before the announcement appeared in the paper, and by October 15, the project employed over 10,000 people. Soldiers began arriving on September 18, 1940, and as the construction progressed, Camp Shelby became the second largest American Army base and the second largest Mississippi city. It accommodated 55,000 troops.⁸

Hattiesburg quickly became a boom town and enjoyed great prosperity. The massive influx of people led to the development of a municipal airport, an additional highway lane, and new bus and train routes to Camp Shelby from the coast. Profits of established businesses increased exponentially, and locals capitalized on the population explosion by opening new businesses. In a single year, the population of nearby Hattiesburg doubled from 20,000 to 40,000. As the camp supplied only the basic necessities for soldiers and workers, Camp Shelby's inhabitants traveled the short distance to Hattiesburg for entertainment. Many of the soldiers and their families also rented homes or apartments in the area. The new arrivals became an integral part of the growing city. Many black soldiers stationed at Camp Shelby brought with them knowledge about the development of the growing racial liberalism in the North, and many of them initiated protests against the discriminations they faced in Mississippi.

⁸ "Shelby Second Largest Army Base in U.S.," *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 1941; "City Rises Like Magic in Hills," *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 1941; "Announce Shelby Wage Scale," *Hattiesburg American*, September 14, 1940.

Some even dared to violate Jim Crow customs and laws. These soldiers and the voices of black protest filtered into the Central Piney Woods as beacons of hope. Yet the black resident soldiers also quickly learned that they had entered a world controlled by the white ruling class. The ubiquitous signs “white” and “colored” served as stark reminders of the oppressive system.⁹

On the eve of the war, white mistreatment of blacks grew harsher in the Central Piney Woods as whites feared that the growing racial liberalism in the North, inspired in part by the free world’s reaction to Nazism and fascism, would dismantle their white supremacist society. Older blacks understood the dangers of white fear, and they remembered the devastation of obliterated expectations. So, they guarded their hope for World II with caution. The burgeoning expectations on the eve of World War II resembled the black optimism at the eve of the Great War. Between 1907 and 1919, the lull in lynchings, the Progressive movement, and World War I inspired black hopes that perhaps the shift in the national conscience and the abeyance of violence might signify a new opportunity for black liberation in the South. In 1917, the federal government

⁹ Quoting Clearese Cook, interview by Kim Adams, November 1994, MOHP Digital. William T. Schmidt, “The Impact of Camp Shelby in World War II on Hattiesburg, Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 39 (Fall 1977): 41-50; “Announce Camp Shelby Wage Scale,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 14, 1940; “City Rises Like Magic in Hills,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 1941; “Shelby Second Largest Army Base,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 1941; Minutes, Meeting of Directors, Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, Business Leaders, and Officials Regarding Camp Shelby, September 17, 1940, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Records, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as HACCR]; *Hattiesburg: A Pictorial History*, ed. Kenneth G. McCarty, Jr. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 74; Richard and Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, August 29, 1991, MOHP Digital; Arvarh E. Strickland, “Remembering Hattiesburg: Growing up Black in Wartime Mississippi,” in *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*, ed. Neil R. McMillen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 147; Iola Williams, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), November 6, 2006, MOHP recording.

constructed the Camp Shelby base in Forrest County, which brought soldiers from all over the nation to the area. W. E. B. DuBois encouraged black participation in the war effort in the belief that as blacks fought to liberate Europe from oppression abroad and proved their valor on the battlefield, they would foster their own liberation at home. Many blacks joined the military while others left the South in the Great Migration North to capitalize on wartime opportunities for employment. The Great War and the Great Migration began the process of nationalizing the race issue and awakening the northern and international conscience to the horrors of black oppression.¹⁰

Mississippi, however, experienced a regression in racial relations as the war came to a close. Because whites feared that black soldiers would return from the battlefield to fight for their liberty, they attacked black soldiers and lynched so many blacks across America in the summer of 1919 that it became known as Red Summer. Jones County whites initiated their bloody summer in the Central Piney Woods when hordes of citizens joined a vigilante posse to commit one of the more macabre racial murders in the state's history. Blacks recalled that day with vivid detail. Whites remembered it well, too. Some radical whites like Myers spoke of it excitedly; others like the racially progressive author James Street recalled it with shame and horror.¹¹

¹⁰ M. W. Hamilton, interview by Orley B. Caudill, February 13, 1978, vol. 464, 18, 1-4, 32, MOHP; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 302-307; "Wars," United States Works Progress Administration, Unpublished WPA Files, Forrest County, Microfilm, Reel 2857, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as WPA Files]; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), 324-336. Victoria Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2001, 164-165.

¹¹ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 303-306. Hulon Myers, interview by Caudill, July 11, 1979, vol. 349, 35-36, MOHP; Gladys Austin, interview, by Patricia Boyett, May 5,

It was June 16, 1919 when whites began their hunt for John Hartfield, a black porter at the Pinehurst Hotel in Laurel. The night before, Hartfield had dragged a young white telephone operator into the woods where he raped her under a sycamore tree. She escaped in the morning and fled home. Word of the rape spread quickly, and everyone expected a lynching. Street, just 16-years-old at the time, had just acquired a summer job as a reporter for the *Laurel Leader-Call*. In direct violation of his father's orders to stay away from the mob, Street rushed to downtown Laurel to cover the story. His father was one of those few progressive whites who considered lynchers "white trash." During the 10-day hunt, posse members terrorized black communities across south Mississippi. They shot Anse McLaurin when they mistakenly identified him as Hartfield and Curtis Henry because he failed to halt when ordered to do so by white men; and they killed Scott Dawkins because he refused to surrender a weapon. The posse also beat and whipped numerous black men and women whom they suspected of helping Hartfield elude capture. The posse even accidentally killed a white soldier before finally tracking Hartfield to a schoolhouse and wounding him in the chest with gunfire.¹²

2009, MOHP recording; James Street, *Look Away: A Dixie Notebook* (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), 11-18, 27-38.

¹² Quoting Street, *Look Away*, 13, *Ibid.*, 14-16, 27-28, 35. "Negro Assaults Young Woman At Ellisville," *Hattiesburg American*, June 16, 1919. "Two More Victims of Mississippi Man Hunt," *Commercial Appeal*, June 25, 1919; "Young Soldier Killed In Hunt For Negro Brute," *Daily News*, June 21, 1919; "Killed In Hartfield Man Hunt," *Vicksburg Herald*, June 22, 1919; "Laurel Relaxes After Lynching," *New Orleans Item*, June [?], 1919, all in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]. "2 Killed in Negro Chase, Number Hurt," *Hattiesburg American*, June 23, 1919; "Negro Hartfield Lynched," *Hattiesburg American*, June 26, 1919; "Hartfield Surrounded in Swamps," *Hattiesburg American*, June 25, 1919.

By the time the 50-car brigade arrived with Hartfield in Ellisville, the town teemed with lynchers. A local doctor tended to Hartfield's wounds while the posse spread the word that they would lynch him in the evening under the tree where he had committed the rape. Local newspapers announced the location in their afternoon editions. Reverend L. G. Gates, the progressive pastor of the First Baptist Church in Laurel, tried to dissuade the gathering crowd from committing murder, but the townspeople ignored him as they shouted: "hang him . . . burn him." As word of the event spread across the Central Piney Woods, businesses and industries shut down. Thousands of white men piled their wives, children, and dogs into their vehicles and poured into Ellisville. They spread out picnic blankets and feasted on fried chicken and cakes as they waited for the festivities to begin. Throngs of teenagers from the lumber camps, including Hulon Myers, caught rides in the back of pickup trucks so they, too, could see a live killing. The victim came out on her porch and waved at the crowd. Not a single local or state authority intervened. Governor Theodore Bilbo, a radical white supremacist, declared that as Hartfield confessed, he had no power to stop the mob.¹³

According to some reports, the mob had grown to 10,000 by the early evening. Near 5:00 p.m., several men took Hartfield from the doctor's office, slipped a noose around his neck and joined the hordes of whites as they led him on a silent, eerie journey toward the tree where the masses awaited the entertainment. When they stopped beneath

¹³ Street, *Look Away*, 35-36. "Hartfield Pays Life," *Hattiesburg American*, June 27, 1919; Hulon Myers, interview, 33-35. "Mob Appoints Committee to Plan Lynching," *New Orleans Item*, June 28, 1919; "Long Chase Ends And Mob Lynches Negro Ravisher," *Times-Picayune*, June 27, 1919; "Big Mob Sees Negro Lynched in Ellisville," *New Orleans States*, June 26, 1919, "Mississippi: Governor Says He Is Powerless" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 5, 1919; "Laurel Negro Lynched Near Crime Scene," *New Orleans Item*, June 27, 1919, all in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

the sycamore, the mob turned into a frenzied pack; men rushed forward to beat, kick, and stab Hartfield. Some men grabbed his arms and legs and severed his fingers and toes for souvenirs. Myers and his friends arrived in time to see the hundreds of hands haul the lynching rope over a sturdy branch until Hartfield swung by his neck off the ground and toward the top of the tree. As the noose strangled Hartfield, masses of white men began shooting toward his swaying body, for everyone wanted to participate. The mob fired close to a thousand bullets. Other whites threw burning sticks below his body. Soon the torrent of bullets cut the rope, and Hartfield dropped into the fire. The body burned until only lumpy ashes remained. Authorities described the lynching as “orderly” and never arrested any of the killers. Nor did they arrest those members of the posse who shot and murdered black men, killed a white man, and beat numerous blacks during the hunt.¹⁴

Infuriated national leaders of the NAACP demanded that the U. S. Congress investigate the lynching immediately. Just a year earlier, the NAACP had launched a campaign to pass anti-lynching legislation. Representative Leonidas Dyer, a Republican from Missouri, proposed a bill that would allow the federal government to punish lynchers who violated the Fourteenth Amendment rights of citizens in the event that the state failed to act, to punish local officials who permitted the lynching to occur, and to force county governments to pay restitution to the victim’s family. The U. S. House of Representatives passed the bill, but it never even reached a vote in the U. S. Senate.

¹⁴ Quoting “Mississippi: Burn to Ashes Man,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 5, 1919. Hulon Myers, interview, 33-35. “Mob Appoints Committee to Plan Lynching,” *New Orleans Item*, June 28, 1919; “Long Chase Ends And Mob Lynches Negro Ravisher,” *Times-Picayune*, June 27, 1919; “Laurel Relaxes After Lynching,” *New Orleans Item*, June [?], 1919, all in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers. “Hartfield Negro Lynched,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 26, 1919; “Hartfield Pays Life,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 27, 1919.

Despite pressure by the NAACP, the federal government failed to intervene to punish Hartfield's lynchers, nor the lynchings that occurred afterward.¹⁵

The renewed threat to the racial order posed by the Great War and the efforts of Republicans and the NAACP to force federal intervention in the South led again to the ascendancy of white radicalism and reinvigorated black beast mythologies. As they had during Reconstruction and Redemption, conservatives swayed once again toward radical mentalities and supported the use of the most powerful weapon at their disposal to punish heresies against their white tyranny—violence. Days after Hartfield's murder, a white posse hunted for a black man because they heard rumors that he had been “discussing” the lynching. A marshal captured him and tried to transport him to the nearby town of Richton to protect him from a mob, but some 25 white men chased down the marshal and forced him to halt his car at gunpoint. They put a rope around the black man's neck, told him they had come to kill him, and then yanked him from the car and dragged him into the woods. No one saw him again. In 1921, a black man, Arthur Jennings, shot at white lawmen when they tried to arrest him on charges of murdering a black woman. After officers jailed him in Hattiesburg, 15 whites, enraged that he dared to shoot at white men, abducted Jennings from the jailhouse and drove him to the outskirts of town. They hanged him unceremoniously from a tree branch. The violence even penetrated the Knight refuge. In November 1920, authorities found Stewart Knight, the mixed-race son of Rachel, brutally murdered. The killer had hacked his body with an axe and shot off part of his head. Authorities arrested Sharpe Welborn, a white man, and they claimed that

¹⁵ John R. Shillady to Congressional Investigation of Lynchers, July 10, 1919, Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett; Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order*, 17.

he killed Knight while trying to rob him. But rumors abounded that Welborn killed him because Knight violated racial mores by intervening in an incident on the behalf of a white woman. An all-white jury convicted Welborn, but only of manslaughter.¹⁶

Along with the revival of lynchings came the revival of the Klan in the Central Piney Woods. In October 1922, Klansmen visited Reverend L. G. Gates—the Jones County minister known for opposing lynchings—to warn him they would protect “the purity of womanhood.” In 1927, an African American, Mack Holliman, enraged whites in Jones County when he tried to register to vote. A group of whites, likely Klansman, forced him out of town by threatening to lynch him. Klansmen even targeted children. Around 1923 in Hattiesburg, after Geneva Ramsay, a black sixth grader, fought several white girls and won the fight, a group of white men barged into the black school and yanked Ramsay out of her classroom. Ramsey’s classmate, Constance Baker later recalled that the teacher could not stop them because “black people just didn’t go against white people And the principal let them go, let the child go, and they beat the child up you never saw Geneva anymore. And the children in [her] neighborhood . . . said Geneva left and went to Chicago.” Baker, like most of her classmates, learned quickly that not even their beloved schools were inviolate from white control.¹⁷

¹⁶ Quoting “Negro Lynched, Laurel Report,” *New Orleans Item*, July 1, 1919, Pt. 7, Ser. A. Reel. 13, NAACP Papers. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 275n, 274n, 165-166. “Raid Jail, Hang Negro,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1921, 13; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 273-275, 305-306.

¹⁷ First quote, “Ku Klux Klan Calls on L. G. Gates,” *The Laurel Daily Leader*, October 20, 1922; second quote, Constance Baker, interview by Kim Adams, April 3, 1995, MOHP Digital. Hulon Myers, interview, 34-37; M. W. Hamilton, interview, 8-9; William F. Dukes, interview by Orley Caudill, January 23, 1973, MOHP Digital; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 164-165. “Ku Klux Klan at Richton Donates to Gates Revival,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 21, 1922; Mack Holliman to NAACP, September 12,

During these turbulent and dangerous years, some whites opposed the Klan and lynchings. When James Street became a novelist, he wrote of the lynchings he witnessed as a young reporter with great sorrow. A child of Laurel and Hattiesburg, the racial landscape of the Central Piney Woods shaped his mind, but not in the way most whites liked. In his youth, Street had grown close to a black teenager his age known as Honey Boy, the son of his nanny. As a child, Honey Boy dreamed of becoming a lawyer like Street's father, but he learned that blacks could have no such dreams in Mississippi. In 1918, when Street prepared to leave his hometown for boarding school, Honey Boy accompanied him to the depot to bid him farewell. He stood on the platform and watched Street's train until he could no longer see it as it traveled toward worlds he would never know. In 1922, while Street worked as a journalist for the *Hattiesburg American*, he received a report that a mob planned to lynch a "Negro buck" known as "Honey Boy" because he "had insulted a white girl." Street rushed to the river town, but he arrived too late to stop the lynching. The local sheriff took him to the cottonwood tree where the mob had already hanged his childhood friend.¹⁸

Six years later, some whites in Hattiesburg tried to prevent the lynching of a well-liked black man, Manual McCallum, who worked as a mechanic for Mutual Auto Sales Company. In November 1928, McCallum approached a group of whites stranded on the side of the road after an automobile accident left their vehicle in a ditch. When he offered to help, one of the men pointed a pistol at him. McCallum grabbed the gun, hit the man on the head with it, and fled. Authorities arrested McCallum for the assault and jailed

1927 and Correspondence between the NAACP and Mack Holliman, September 1927 – January 1928, Pt. 4, Reel 2, NAACP Papers.

¹⁸ Quoting Street, *Look Away*, 233-234; *Ibid.*, 11.

him, but the sheriff released him when no one pressed charges. Soon word spread around town that the whites McCallum tried to help planned to hang him. McCallum's boss, Charles Ross, and Sheriff Joe Gray helped McCallum flee town, and Ross secured a job for him in Mobile, Alabama. In December, McCallum thought the danger had passed, and he returned to his family in Hattiesburg.¹⁹

Near midnight on December 26, McCallum and his wife lay asleep in their bed in the Arledge Quarters on Sixteenth Street in Hattiesburg when a loud knock at the door awakened Mrs. McCallum. A male voice, identifying himself as the sheriff, demanded she open the door. She complied and realized her mistake too late. Seven white men stood before her, none of whom held the post of sheriff. The men stormed into the home, yanked McCallum from his bed, and dragged him to their vehicle. McCallum's wife raced to her father's home as the vehicle sped away, screaming "Papa, the white man have got [him]." The white men transported McCallum to the Richburg Hill gravel pit. They tied a rope to a tree near the pit and fastened the noose around his neck. When they shoved him off the ridge, the fall failed to break his neck. The rope strangled him to death. The following day, two laborers found the corpse and contacted Sheriff Gray. When a Forrest County constable arrived, he looked casually at the dangling body and offhandedly remarked, "he's a good Nigger now." Within the week, someone burned down the McCallum's home and two adjacent cabins. Although McCallum's wife saw

¹⁹ "Probe By Jury of Lynching in Miss. Is Demand," *The News Tribune*, December 30, 1928 and "Negro's Body Half Clothed is Found on Richburg Hill," *Hattiesburg American*, December 27, 1928, both in, Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

and could identify the men who abducted her husband, lawmen claimed they lacked evidence to arrest anyone.²⁰

The lynching of McCallum proved a significant event in Mississippi because several prominent white citizens condemned the murder and demanded an investigation. The Chamber of Commerce hosted a meeting attended by 500 citizens, including many prominent people and several ministers. In an official resolution, Chamber President R. B. Lelod demanded that Circuit Court Judge Robert S. Hall convene a special session of the grand jury to investigate the murder, commanded Sheriff Gray to arrest the lynchers, and insisted that Governor Bilbo and state law enforcement provide all necessary resources and political influence to bring the murderers to justice. Reverend Joseph A. Smith of Main Street Baptist Church delivered the most passionate appeal for justice when he declared: "I am painfully tired of these perfunctory verdicts of the coroner's juries stating that the deceased came to his death at the hands of parties unknown and letting it go at that. I dare say there are people in this city who know who committed this dastardly crime. I want the cowardly cringing, white-livered yellow-blooded scoundrels arrested and convicted." The entire audience voted in favor of the resolution. The chamber of commerce raised a \$20,000 reward fund with large donations from prominent citizens. It was the first time in Mississippi that so many white citizens of a community met to condemn a lynching and demand an investigation.²¹

²⁰ Quoting "Mississippi Ends Old Year By Lynching Two," *Chicago Defender*, January 5, 1929. "Negro's Body Half Clothed is Found on Richburg Hill," *Hattiesburg American*, December 27, 1928, in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

²¹ Quoting "Mississippi Ends Old Year By Lynching Two," *Chicago Defender*, January 5, 1929. "Hattiesburg Negro Lynched by Mob," *The Itemizer*, December 27, 1928; "Negro Lynched at Hattiesburg Cause Mystery," *The Democrat*, December 28,

On January 7, 1929, Judge Hall brought the grand jury into session and ordered the jurors to investigate the lynching. Hall expressed the common conservative perspective of white violence when he noted that he empathized with mobs who failed to reign in the passions some crimes inflamed, but he declared that in the McCallum case, men acted without cause. Still, he also pointed out to jurors that if they handed down indictments on weak testimony forcing a petit jury to acquit defendants, it would harm more than help Mississippi. On January 10, the jurors condemned the killing, as a “stain upon the fair name of Forrest County,” but they claimed that they lacked the evidence to deliver indictments and requested that the next grand jury proceed with the investigation. No such investigation occurred. African American pharmacist E. Hammond Smith later recalled that as usual, authorities failed to act. As most whites held conservative and moderate white supremacist views, they considered the McCallum killing “a bad lynching” because he was innocent of any crime. In contrast, they considered the sadistic killing of Hartfield a “good lynching” because Hartfield was guilty. Yet even participants in “bad lynchings” across Mississippi rarely had to fear retribution because an indictment proved rare, a conviction practically impossible, and an appropriate sentence never. Radical whites like McCallum’s lynchers had nothing to fear. Fealty toward white supremacy always trumped justice. The McCallum murder was the last recorded lynching in the Central Piney Woods for almost 14 years, but it is likely that there were others.²²

1928; “Hub Citizens Protest Negro Lad’s Lynching,” *The News*, December 29, 1928; “Lynching At Hattiesburg Is Condemned,” *The Herald*, December 29, 1928, all in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

²² First quote, Special Session of Grand Jury Report, January 10, 1929, *Forrest County: Minute Books Circuit Court*, vol. 9. 549, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; all other quotes, McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 241, 245; *Ibid.*, 249-250. Street, *Look Away*,

James Nix, an African American growing up in Laurel during World War II characterized the Laurel of his childhood as a place of “lynchings and hangings.” The terror of those lynching years still haunted the Nix family as it haunted most blacks of their generation, and parents inculcated that fear in their children to instill in them the prudence necessary for survival. Blacks had to learn to wear, as bluesman Paul Laurence Dunbar called it, the “mask that grins and lies.” To stave off threats to their lives, most blacks assumed the roles, wore the masks, and memorized the scripts of black deference created by whites and moved in perfect step across the Jim Crow theater. Only when they left the stage and entered the relative safety of their churches, schools, businesses, and neighborhoods, could they remove their masks. Consequently, as author Ralph Ellison illustrated in his novel, *Invisible Man*, blacks were “invisible” to whites because whites only saw them as they wished to view them—in a series of dehumanized stereotypes that fit white needs.²³

James Nix’s parents tried simultaneously to teach him the disparate values of internal racial pride and external racial subservience. They directed him to play the obsequious role when necessary and reprimanded him harshly when the spotlight caught his blunders because severe repercussions could result. Nix recalled that while riding a bus with his father, he noticed a pretty white girl. He remarked to his father, “Daddy, isn’t that nice, pretty, long hair?” His father whipped him. Later, Nix understood that the

62; “Grand Jury Investigating McCallum Murder,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 7, 1929; E. Hammond Smith, interview by Orley B. Caudill, April 8, 1982, MOHP Digital. “To Investigate the Lynching of Negro,” *The News*, January 1, 1929, Pt 7, Ser. A, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

²³ First quote, James Nix, interview; second quote, Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 431; *Ibid.*, 43, 430; third quote, Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1995).

script of white supremacy prohibited him from uttering such words, and he realized that his father had to punish him to protect him. In contrast, Maddie Jones Austin Scott so feared whites that she taught her children to become, not simply act, subservient to whites. Scott worked as a cook for Quitman Ross, a prominent attorney; and although he empathized with the black plight, Scott even feared him. She was 12-years-old when the mob lynched Hartfield, and she never recovered from those lynching years. Once she became a mother, she repeated the story of the lynching to her three daughters often. She recalled how her aunt's family had fled Laurel in the aftermath, and she recounted how she had begged her father to let her flee with them. He refused. Scott so feared angering whites that long after the Civil Rights Movement, she still refused to try to vote. Scott's daughter Gladys accepted segregation in a matter of fact manner, and she later recalled, "we understood that there were things for blacks and there were things for whites and it did not bother us because it was a way of life . . . Well, we couldn't have gone to the places to eat because we didn't have any money to eat with."²⁴

Still, no matter how hard black parents tried to protect their children, like the generations before them, their children experienced their "baptism" into the racial order. Born in 1931 to become the fifth in the line of 12 children, Daisy Harris learned early to fear white men when she witnessed her proud school principal, N. R. Burger "trembling" in the presence of the white superintendent. She learned to fear police officers when they barged into her family home in the middle of the night and accused her father of stealing a bicycle. One officer shouted, "Joe B put some clothes on. You are under arrest." When her father protested his innocence, the officer refused to listen. Harris recalled: "So

²⁴ First quote, James Nix, interview; second quote, Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett.

Daddy gets up like a little child” and obeyed the orders. Before they could arrest him, however, they received a radio call that another officer had apprehended the suspect. Rather than apologizing, one of the officers released her father, stating, “Boy, you can go back to bed. We have the suspect.” As Harris came of age in the war years, she often saw white police officers invade black neighborhoods to drag patrons from juke joints and beat them. Harris’ brothers so feared becoming targets of police or other angry whites that they all left Mississippi as soon as they had the means.²⁵

Black girls and women also had much to fear; they knew well the stories of white men who preyed on black females. Parents of rape victims often counseled their daughters to erase the attacks from their memories because the white authorities never investigated such incidents. Iola Williams learned early to avoid white men. She later recalled: “imagine being a little girl and your mom just made you a cute little white dress . . . and you are going up Pine Street . . . and here’s a bunch of . . .rednecks and they’re woffing at you and scaring you to death and then they spit tobacco on your white dress . . . you learn right then to cross the street when white folks were up there. You learned early.” They also learned to avoid white youths. Williams and her friends had to pass by a white school on the way to Eureka where blacks attended. A group of white children who lived across the street from the school often threw rocks at them and called them degrading names. And the white parents contacted the police to complain about the black children passing through their neighborhood. The children feared the white officers and

²⁵ First quote, Leon Litwack, *Trouble In Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knof, 1999), 3; second and fifth quotes, Daisy Harris Wade, “Reminiscences,” n. d., n. p., Daisy Harris Wade Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]; third and fourth quotes, Daisy Harris Wade interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

ran from them when they arrived. Williams and her friends eventually decided to take a different route—if they walked down the railroad tracks instead, no one bothered them. When they were near whites, they wore the mask of subservience.²⁶

Although 18-year-old James Jones had learned to adhere to the Jim Crow racial script as a child, he sometimes faltered, in part because he experienced ambivalent relationships with whites. As a son of a maid, Isabella Marsh Jones, he had grown up under white auspices. During the late 1930s, Jones worked as a “houseboy” for the Welches, a family with a moderate, paternalist racial mentality. He arrived at their home in the early mornings to bring “Lawyer Welch” his coffee and the paper, set the table for breakfast, and warm-up Welch’s Buick. On a particularly cold morning in the fall of 1938, Jones climbed onto the bus that would transport him to a stop near the Welch home. The bus was mostly empty, and he selected a seat in the black section but as close as possible to the heater located in the white section. The bus driver glared at Jones in his rearview mirror and ordered him to move to the back. When Jones responded that he was sitting in the black section, the driver rushed down the aisle, grabbed Jones, hurled him off the bus, and shouted, “Now you walk.” Jones hurried home and retrieved his sister’s bicycle and raced to the Welch home. When he arrived late, he apologized to Mrs. Welch and informed her of the bus incident that delayed him. A few days later, Lawyer Welch gave Jones a check for \$250.00 from the bus driver. Welch, a wealthy lawyer, had

²⁶ Iola Williams, interview by Patricia (Buzard) Boyett.

threatened to sue the driver unless he financially compensated Jones for the mistreatment.²⁷

Still, blacks had to tread carefully even around white paternalists. Jones was in awe of Lawyer Welch because he dreamed of becoming an attorney. Both of Welch's sons attended Harvard University, and his daughter studied at the Sorbonne. Whenever time permitted Jones to take a break from his work, he read their used college books and perused Welch's law books. Although he often asked Welch about various cases, he never revealed to him that he wanted to become a lawyer. Whites had recently threatened to lynch a black lawyer unless he left town. Jones had slipped once years earlier while cutting lawns for the Harris family on Sixth Avenue. Mrs. Harris often worked on her flower bed while Jones mowed the lawn, and they became well-acquainted to the point that Jones shared with her his plans to obtain a college degree. She held progressive racial views, and during their many conversations, she encouraged him to pursue his dream. One day, she mentioned Jones's aspirations to her husband. Mr. Harris snapped, "he go to college? He'll come back wanting my job." Jones assumed quickly a more obsequious posture of his ascribed deferent status; he assured Mr. Harris, "No sir, I wouldn't even try."²⁸

Blacks had to employ particular caution around police officers and to remember to use the deferential etiquette expected of them. While finishing his senior year at Oak Park High School in 1942, Jones worked at the Pinehurst Hotel as a server during his

²⁷ First and second, quotes, James Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008, third quote James Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recordings.

²⁸ James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008.

school lunch hour and as dishwasher at the hotel's coffee shop at night. At night, bellhops often slipped him money to smuggle alcohol for hotel guests. Jones County was dry, but alcohol was plentiful at the white country club and at black juke joints. Police officers took pay-offs from black club owners to look the other way, and they simply ignored the rich whites. One night, as Jones drove his mother's 1935 Chrysler back from a juke joint with whiskey for a hotel guest, his car broke down in front of city hall. When he saw a policeman approaching, Jones shoved the liquor under the front seat. "Hey boy, what's wrong?" the policeman asked. Jones explained he was on his way to work at the hotel. The officer had not noticed the liquor, but he ordered Jones to follow him to the police station. At the station, the clerk asked him who owned the Chrysler, and he responded "my mother, Mrs. Isabella Jones." The policeman slapped Jones so hard he knocked him across the room and shouted: "Don't you ever Miss no nigger to me. I'm going to put you in jail and let you rot." Then he shoved him down the stairs, threw him into a cell, and snarled, "You one of them Chicago niggers?" Jones responded: "No sir, I was raised and born here, you should know my Daddy, my Daddy worked across the street at the YWCA." The officer snapped, "I don't want to know" and slammed the door.²⁹

Jones climbed onto the top bunk and peered out of the tiny window that faced the street. When he saw a black man walking nearby, he called him over and begged him to bring the bellhop to him. As soon as the bellhop learned of Jones' predicament, he had a white employee alert the hotel manager who contacted the jail and informed the clerk: "James . . . works for me. He ain't no problem. Let him go. I'll take responsibility." The clerk immediately released Jones. Throughout his life, Jones relied on white paternalism

²⁹ James Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recording.

to keep him safe. Because he and his family had earned a reputation as hard workers who had never caused any trouble, he had always known conservative and moderate whites who would vouch for him and protect him. Yet amidst World War II, as the renewed trend toward racial progressivism on the national stage threatened white supremacy in the South, paternalism ebbed again while radicalism surged.³⁰

In the wake of the turmoil, Jones planned to leave the South. When Jones graduated high school, Lawyer Welch's oldest son, who worked in the attorney general's office in Washington D. C. and harbored progressive tendencies, offered Jones a job as a houseboy. He promised to provide Jones with enough free time to attend college at Howard University, and Jones would have the entire third floor of the home to himself. Jones wanted to accept the offer. However, that same year, Jones learned that his father was dying of complications with diabetes, and he had just found out that his girlfriend was pregnant. His mother, who had always believed he was destined for greatness, begged him to flee Laurel and embrace his dreams. Yet Jones realized that the only morally acceptable choice was to marry his girlfriend and care for his family. So, he remained in Laurel and took a job at the Masonite Plant. In 1943 the army drafted Jones into service and sent him to fight for Europe's freedom from tyranny, though he himself had never known such liberty. Still, Jones and many other blacks were cautiously hopeful that this time the war might also conquer southern despotism and deliver freedom to them, too.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008.

World War II caused great shifts in the black community. The youth like James Jones were drafted or joined the military, and many of those ineligible to serve joined the Second Great Migration north to work in the war-related industries in places like Chicago. When Gladys Austin graduated Oak Park High School in 1945, only three boys graduated with her. Many of her male classmates and those a few years younger than her had lied about their age to join the military. At the same time, thousands of soldiers flooded in and out of Camp Shelby. The black soldiers became an integral part of black life across the Central Piney Woods, and their presence caused great shifts in the collective black conscience. During their stay in Hattiesburg, many of the soldiers, who hailed from states all across the nation, brought with them new ideas about the efficacy of black protest, and the more outraged among them challenged Jim Crow. The United States military sent over 80 percent of the 920,000 blacks who served in the armed forces to bases in the South.³²

Some of these black soldiers dared to protest the mistreatment they faced in the segregated environment. Private Norman Brittingham criticized Camp Shelby's racial policies. Black soldiers had to wait hours to acquire seats on buses to take them to town; doctors treated them like "dogs;" and white officers beat and degraded black soldiers and sent them to the stockades arbitrarily. Some black soldiers clashed with local white police officers. During one raucous fight, black soldiers knocked Constable C. J. Cargill to the floor. Enraged, Cargill fired toward the soldiers and a crowd of bystanders, but his shots missed their mark. Black soldiers also complained that the military segregated the

³² Ibid; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett; Strickland, "Remembering Hattiesburg," 152-154; Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 135-136.

military police into separate units, and although it armed white police with .45 caliber pistols, it only armed black MPs with night sticks. After black soldiers and locals complained repeatedly about the disparate treatment, the military armed black MPs with pistols and integrated military police vehicles. The presence of military police had a profound impact on local black residents, for they had never before seen a black police officer. They began to imagine a world in which African Americans could obtain powerful positions.³³

As black expectations rose, locals and soldiers even dared to protest Jim Crow laws, but they did so at great peril. Busses became overcrowded with the increased population, which forced whites to move toward the back near black riders. When whites complained about their close proximity to blacks, bus drivers began ordering blacks to stand in the back. Laws also prohibited blacks from entering the bus until all white passengers had boarded. Chief of Police M. M. Little warned residents that the city would fine violators and provided bus drivers with the authority to remove dissenters from their busses. To enforce compliance of transportation employees, the city fined drivers who failed to adhere to the law. Soon after Little's warning, a white bus driver killed a black passenger for violating the bus rules. The police considered the incident a justifiable homicide. The city also prohibited taxi companies from transporting black and white riders in the same vehicle. When soldiers violated some of these segregation laws, Chief Little warned that they must adhere to the laws of his city or face punishment. The chief

³³ Quoting Norman Brittingham to Whom It May Concern, July 17, 1943, in Philip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Inc., 1983,) 18. Strickland, "Remembering Hattiesburg," 153, 157; Iola Williams, interview by Brad Kavan, August 26, 2004, MOHP recording; Vernon Dahmer Jr., interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 2, 2001, MOHP recording; N. R. Burger, interview by R. Wayne Pyle, May 11, 1982, MOHP Digital.

also announced that black soldiers must confine themselves to black areas of town unless business demanded that they enter white Hattiesburg. Blacks were not to enter white neighborhoods at night unless they worked for white people.³⁴

The arrival of Japanese-Americans troops in Hattiesburg including the 100th Infantry Battalion in January and the 442nd Infantry Regiment in April 1943, presented problems for a city constructed for “two races.” City officials decided to classify Japanese-Americans as whites, allowing them to patronize white establishments and prohibiting them from entering black Hattiesburg. Although some Japanese-American soldiers enthusiastically embraced their “white” status, others defied it by patronizing black establishments. Considering the palpable racism toward Japanese-Americans in the nation after Pearl Harbor, white Hattiesburg’s decision to accept them in the white world, while still rejecting blacks, revealed the depth of white racism toward African Americans.³⁵

Frustrated black soldiers sought solace in the black community, which in great contrast to the white community, welcomed them like long lost family members. The black community fought for and received funds to construct a United Service Organization (USO) building in the Mobile-Bouie community. The white establishment allocated \$42,000 for the simple frame structure built on Sixth Street in the heart of black Hattiesburg. Although the structure paled in comparison to the nearly \$116,000 spent on the redbrick USO building for whites located on Front Street, few southern cities actually

³⁴ Strickland, “Remembering Hattiesburg,” 153-156; “Police Order Bus Passenger Segregation,” *Hattiesburg American*. February 22, 1941; E. Hammond Smith, interview by Orley B. Caudill, April 8, 1982, MOHP Digital.

³⁵ Strickland, “Remembering Hattiesburg,” 155-156.

built a USO structure for blacks. Iola Williams called the Hattiesburg USO a “home away from home,” a place where black troops could escape the cruelties and humiliations they faced in white Hattiesburg and where locals flocked to offer their hospitality and friendship. Black businessmen and teachers ran the USO with the aid of ministers, students, and various other black citizens. The USO housed a library and counseling services, and it hosted dances. Black community leaders selected the most reputable women in Jones and Forrest counties to join a girls club and attend dances with black soldiers.³⁶

Local blacks also showed their support for the troops by raising funds for the USO, volunteering for the Red Cross, and launching war bond drives, and black children collected scrap metal for the war effort. In turn, the soldiers immersed themselves in the community: they joined churches, led church choirs, volunteered at the county health department, and socialized with locals. They also patronized black restaurants and bootlegging joints in Palmer’s Crossing as well as Bill Carmichael’s Beer Garden in Hattiesburg. The soldiers and the locals forged deep bonds, and black residents of the Central Piney Woods developed an abiding admiration for the courageous soldiers. When troops received orders to ship out, the black community staged farewell parties at the train station. At the Sixth Street USO and throughout the businesses in black Hattiesburg, black soldiers like black residents enjoyed a reprieve from the ruthless world of Jim Crow. Historian Arvarh Strickland, who grew up in Hattiesburg, remembered: “On the black side of that racial wall that divided Hattiesburg was a community with institutions—families, churches, schools, and organizations. And there were heroic

³⁶ Quoting Iola Williams, interview by Brad Kavan, MOHP recording. Strickland, “Remembering Hattiesburg,” 154-155; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett.

figures. In that community we found faith and love.” Iola Williams remembered Mobile-Bouie “as our playground” where children and teenagers gathered on the streets and in the businesses, played with their friends, and attended Bible School. The black community watched over the children—they celebrated, disciplined, and protected them. As Williams remembered, “It was a village and that whole village there raised that child.”³⁷

The influx of outsiders certainly affected the black conscience, but it also impacted the black pocketbook. As the military base became a busy city again, local blacks found new opportunities for work. Because Camp Shelby paid blacks and whites equal wages—unlike Hattiesburg employers—many black women quit their domestic jobs and many black men and women terminated their employment in white companies for better paying work at Shelby. The mass exodus of the black workforce to Camp Shelby forced Hattiesburg companies to pay black employees better. Segregation provided middle class black entrepreneurs and business owners with opportunities for further advancing their economic status during the war. Since white-owned and white-run establishments refused to serve black soldiers and laborers, the new residents spent all their money in black-owned and managed businesses. Several black farmers living outside of the towns also prospered during the war. Vernon Dahmer received a deferment from military service because he owned a farm and had six children. A man of great ambition and with an entrepreneurial spirit, Dahmer prospered from the wartime needs. With his profits, he bought a tractor; built an ice house and a gas station; and constructed

³⁷ First quote, Strickland, “Remembering Hattiesburg”; all other quotes, Iola Williams interview, by Patricia Buzard (Boyett). Ben and Mable Fielder, interview by Neil R. McMillen, Jan 29, 1994, vol. 483, 51, MOHP; Iola Williams, interview by Brad Kavan; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett.

a grist mill and lumber mill. He also opened a grocery store where he sold various foodstuffs and beverages, home grown vegetables and fruits, and fresh meat acquired from his farm-raised hogs and cows. He taught his children how to work in all of these businesses. They stocked shelves, ran the cash register, pumped gas, fixed flats, cut lumber, and ground corn into cornmeal.³⁸

The war also helped factory workers as it encouraged labor union leaders to move into Mississippi. However, the movement failed to gain much momentum until after the war. In 1941, union leaders began infiltrating the Hercules Plant in Hattiesburg, a momentous breakthrough considering the plant was one of the largest employers in the Central Piney Woods. Over the next several years, they tried to open more job opportunities to blacks by terminating the unwritten discriminatory policy of white-only jobs. They faced considerable white resistance, and throughout the war period, they held segregated meetings. Richard Boyd, a black worker and union member, emphasized that “Hercules would have balked at us meeting together.” Still, after holding separate meetings, black and white representatives met together with the company liaisons. Unions also promoted black suffrage. In 1941, a group of southern progressives formed the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, which considered the poll tax used by southern states a financial barrier to black voting in the South. The NAACP and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) worked in conjunction with the committee to outlaw the poll tax as a stipulation for voting in federal elections. The CIO and its union

³⁸ Richard Boyd, interview; Strickland, “Growing Up in Black in Wartime Mississippi,” 150; Vernon Dahmer Jr., speech, Symposium on Civil Rights in Hattiesburg, June 5, 2001, Gonzalez Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, tape-recording, McCain, USM; Gordon A. Martin, *Count Them One by One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 3, 116-117.

affiliate, the International Woodworkers of America, sent letters to Mississippi leaders, including Congressman William Colmer, whose district included the Central Piney Woods, and United States Senator Theodore Bilbo, imploring them to vote in favor of the Geyer Anti-Poll Tax Bill. They pointed out that the poll tax disfranchised large portions of the population, denied citizens their basic voting rights, and imperiled America's standing as a model for democracy. Abolishing the poll tax was a patriotic duty.³⁹

Mississippi leaders mobilized against these progressive national forces by making states rights arguments to counteract them and by red-baiting all civil rights and union activities. The white establishment opposed vehemently union meddling in its racial affairs, particularly when it attacked black disfranchisement, one of the southern linchpins to sustain white supremacy. The Mississippi white establishment not only kept blacks from the ballot through the poll tax but with a two-year residency requirement, and the "understanding clause," which required citizens seeking to register to interpret an assigned portion of the Mississippi Constitution of 1890. In 1940, white leaders sought to further obstruct black voting by removing civic education from black schools. The Mississippi legislature passed a bill that prohibited textbooks used in black schools to mention "voting, elections, civic responsibility, and democracy." Hoping to quash the renewed threat to white tyranny, William Colmer labeled the Anti-Poll Tax Bill communist-inspired legislation and contended that communists sought to divide the United States in a time of war when the republic's victory depended upon unity. The Communist Party, he declared, had been "preying upon" blacks to join its ranks and used

³⁹ Quoting Richard Boyd, interview. Steven F. Lawson, *Running For Freedom*, 16-18; 115. Philip Murray to William Colmer, October 8, 1942; and E. E. Benedict to William Colmer, n. d., both in William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Colmer Papers].

their advocacy of the bill to build loyalty. He even alleged that the NAACP and the CIO possessed more “communists than all other groups in the country.” Colmer warned his colleagues that if they passed the bill, they would fall down a slippery slope of federal encroachment. Eventually, he predicted, the national government would eradicate other voting requirements in the South and produce political chaos in the region.⁴⁰

Whites in the Central Piney Woods supported the white patriarchs when they attacked labor legislation and the anti-poll tax bill. An elite local businessman, T. F. Dreyfus, informed Colmer that the “labor and negro situation” had grown dangerous. He declared that “Southerners are not going to consent to negro domination [,] and we have numerous friends who are Northern born and have lived in our community several years who think like we do after they understand the negro question as we do.” The Hattiesburg branch of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America organization passed a resolution opposing the anti-poll tax bill and praised Bilbo and Colmer for their stance against it. Colmer lauded the local union for ignoring national pressure from big labor. Bilbo promised his constituents that the “negro-loving Yankees will have ‘to ride over my dead body’ before they will pass their unconstitutional monstrosity.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ First quote, John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 6; second quote, Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 137; all other quotes, William Colmer, “Anti-Poll Tax Speech,” House of Representatives, October 13, 1942, 3, *Ibid.*, 2-10, Colmer Papers, McCain. Colmer incorrectly referred to the NAACP as the Society for the Advancement of Colored People in his speech.

⁴¹ First and second quote, Frog to William Colmer, October 19, 1942 and T. F. Dreyfus to William Colmer, October 21, 1942, both in Colmer Papers; third quote, Theodore Bilbo to Waller, February 8, 1943, Bilbo Papers. Ben H. Waller to William Colmer, February 4, 1943, Colmer to Waller, February 11, 1943, both in Colmer Papers; Waller, to Bilbo, February 4, 1943, and Bilbo to Waller, February 8, 1943, both in Bilbo Papers.

Despite the perilous atmosphere, wartime changes inspired local blacks to defy the white tyranny with acts that most whites considered heretical in Mississippi like requesting federal intervention when whites abused them and seeking their constitutional right to vote. In August 1941, several black bourgeois leaders in Hattiesburg, launched a collective heresy when they developed the Negro Civic Welfare Association (NCWA) to develop their communities and to improve racial relations. Prominent members included a local dentist DeForrest Jackson and Principal N. R. Burger of Eureka and Rowan Schools. The NCWA initiated its first protest against white supremacy when the all-white Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the all-white real estate board, tried to transform the Robertson Place federal colored housing project into a white project. The federal government had developed the project for impoverished black families who lived in shanties that lacked indoor plumbing. As the project neared completion, poor blacks looked forward to enjoying decent living conditions. When white patriarchs tried to hijack the project, the NCWA appealed to the federal government. Governor Tom Bailey sent Lieutenant Governor Dennis Murphey to Hattiesburg to change the minds of NCWA members, but the black leaders refused to capitulate. Jackson emphatically informed Murphey that the black community refused to accept the transfer of the project and repeatedly contacted the War Department to complain. Finally, the federal government intervened and ordered that the project remain a black housing facility. Burger rightly classified the triumph as the first significant civil rights battle launched by the local black community. The NCWA worked quietly to achieve other feats, including the improvement of sanitation, police protection, and school crossings in black Hattiesburg. The presence of the base, the increasing economic

vitality of black Hattiesburg, and the hope unleashed by the war inspired the black vanguard to take small steps toward change.⁴²

Blacks also launched individual acts of dissent when some of them visited the Forrest County Circuit Clerk, L. M. Cox, to register to vote. When Vernon Dahmer, accompanied by his eldest son and namesake, Vernon, Jr., entered the registrar's office, Cox simply ignored them. After the Dahmers waited quietly for some time, Cox grumbled, "Yeah, what do you want?" Dahmer informed Cox that he had paid his poll taxes, and he came to register to vote. Annoyed, Cox handed Dahmer a card containing a section of the Mississippi Constitution, and ordered him to read and interpret it. He returned to his desk. Dahmer read the card and placed it back on the counter, but Cox ignored him. Finally, Dahmer said, "Sir . . . I'm finished now." Disgusted, Cox returned to the counter and asked for Dahmer's interpretation. Dahmer explained correctly the contents and meaning of the section he had read, but Cox shook his head and said, "Nah, you don't understand." Dahmer quietly turned away and left with his son. He would return again and again, like many other African Americans. Determined to register, Richard Boyd visited Cox every Monday. Finally, in the seventh month Cox placed his name in the registration books. Around 15 other black people managed to register in Forrest County during the forties.⁴³

⁴² Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce Minutes Re: Camp Shelby, September 7, 1940, HACCR; Arvarh E. Strickland, "Remembering Hattiesburg," 150-151, 157; N. R. Burger interview.

⁴³ Quoting Vernon Dahmer Jr., speech, Symposium on Civil Rights in Hattiesburg. Richard Boyd, interview; Arvarh Strickland, "Remembering Hattiesburg," 157.

The war also emboldened some local blacks to rebel against racial etiquette. Iola Williams's grandmother became increasingly angry when white men referred to her as "Auntie." After a while, she responded, "Which one of my brothers do you belong to?" Even children rebelled. In Jones County, the nine Keahy children had long grown accustomed to hard work, as they spent their weekends and summers working on their farm. Every day after school, they trudged from Mt. Olive School to the bus station and rode in the back of the bus to Laurel where the girls worked at Walgreen's as cooks, food preparers, and dishwashers. The boys delivered prescriptions until 10:30 at night. During breaks, they tried to complete some of their homework. Often white boys who dined at the white-only booths and counters harassed the Keahey girls. One day, three white boys repeatedly called the girls "niggers" and laughed at their frozen expressions. Maycie Keahey recalled, "We'd had enough." So Maycie's older sister Mattie spit on lettuce and tomato and wiped them on her shoe before dressing the sandwich. Mattie and her sisters watched as the boys unknowingly ate the spit and dirt filled sandwiches. Then, as Maycie recalled, it "was our time to laugh." Maycie's brothers also confronted white harassment, but more aggressively. A group of white boys who lived near the Keahey home in the Powers community in Jones County pelted the Keahey boys with rocks when they walked their road to retrieve their mail. Their bullying ended when the Keahy boys beat up the whites. The white parents resolved the conflict with the Keahy parents civilly, an oddity in the South as whites typically responded with violence to these incidents. As young men, the Keahey sons were all drafted into the military and none of them ever returned to live in Laurel. The oldest, Earnest, always knew he had to leave Laurel; as he later told Maycie, "If I had stayed in Mississippi, I wouldn't be here today." Maycie

understood because Earnest had never been able to accept the dance of deference that often kept blacks alive.⁴⁴

The greatest challenge to racial injustice in Mississippi came from Howard Wash, an unwitting heretic. Wash never planned his act of rebellion against the white regime. He held no memberships in any racial organization nor had he overtly participated in any manner in the struggle for black inclusion. His violence against white oppression emerged spontaneously on May 18, 1942, when he killed his white boss, Clint Welborn, and fled from the horrors he knew he would face if caught by the white police force. For eight years, Wash, his wife Louise, and their eight children had lived in a small house on the premises of the Welborn Dairy Farm. Wash worked as the overseer of Welborn's livestock, and Louise served as the Welborn family maid. Prior to the day he killed Welborn, Wash had neither a criminal record, nor a reputation for causing trouble. After the lynching, several whites described him as an alcoholic, "irresponsible," "a difficult negro to handle," and "a wild negro," but they conceded that they lacked any behavioral examples to substantiate their claims. Newspapers described Wash as a brawny black man with a one inch scar above his eye, a tattoo of a woman on his right forearm, two missing fingers and a missing thumb on one hand, and they noted that multiple calluses and corns on his feet caused him to limp. The black community portrayed Wash in gentler terms, characterizing him as a church-going Baptist whom they knew as trustworthy, quiet, and dependable. According to a few whites and many blacks, Clint Welborn had a reputation for cruelty. Louise Wash described him as mean and difficult.

⁴⁴ First quote, Iola Williams, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett); all other quotes, Maycie Gore, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording. Arvarh E. Strickland, "Remembering Hattiesburg," 147.

A local attorney and distant relative to Welborn, Walter S. Welch, portrayed him as an “overbearing, harsh, task-master.” He considered Wash lazy and unintelligent—the type of person who easily annoyed Welborn.⁴⁵

Some locals believed that Wash killed Welborn in self-defense, while others claimed he killed the man in a senseless rage. Stories vary on why and exactly how the conflict transpired; however, no contemporary believed that Wash planned to kill Welborn. Witnesses later stated that they overheard Welborn and Wash arguing on the morning of the attack, but no one observed the event. After the struggle, Wash rushed out the backdoor, and moments later Martha Welborn and her daughter entered the barn where they found Clint lying in a “pool of blood” and making “feeble groans.” The women started screaming. When Deputy Sheriff Lester Welch arrived, he found Clint Welborn horribly beaten. He had multiple lacerations and bruises as well as a broken nose. Wash had nearly bitten off one of Welborn’s fingers. The deputy also found a shovel and milk buckets near Welborn’s pummeled body which he suspected that Wash had used to beat Welborn. As Welborn lay unconscious in the local hospital, authorities from Parchman, Laurel, and Poplarville led by Jones County Sheriff J. Press Reddoch and Deputy Lester Welch used bloodhounds to “hunt” Howard Wash. Wash had fled into

⁴⁵ First second, and third quotes, FBI Report, December 1, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-10, 6; Ibid., 2-6; fourth quote, FBI Report, December 31, 1942, Wash FBI File, # 44-661-13,10; Ibid., 3-11. “Reward is Offered For Capture of Fugitive Negro,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 20, 1942; “Negro Accused in Welborn Cast Tells His Story,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1942; FBI Report, December 1, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-10.

a nearby swamp where he hid for sometime until he heard gunshots. He ran again. For several days, he hid in the woods.⁴⁶

When Welborn died on the morning of May 20, the white community exploded with rage, and authorities responded like a police state, intensifying the “hunting” for the assailant and interrogating any blacks they considered suspicious. Reddoch and Welch arrested seven black people for “questioning.” The local newspaper praised Welborn as a patriot who served in the military and the National Guard and advertised rewards for Wash’s capture. The search continued for one month and seven days. Wash fled to several different cities, as he tried to evade the search party. In late June, authorities found him in the black district of Poplarville, located 40 miles south of Hattiesburg. During his subsequent interrogation, Wash admitted that he “had difficulty” with his boss but claimed he had never planned to kill him. Wash’s attorney Luther Saul, a man of a progressive or at least a moderate racial mentality, fought hard for his black client. First, he sought to broker a deal with District Attorney Andrew Curie and County Attorney Paul G. Swartzfager. Saul contended that Wash killed Welborn in self-defense and tried to reduce the plea to manslaughter. H. H. Welborn, Clint’s brother, successfully demanded the state reject the plea. Because the case involved a black man killing a white

⁴⁶ First and second quotes, “Negro Accused in Welborn Case Tells His Story,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1942; third quote, “Bloodhounds Used in Hunt For Negro Attacker,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 19, 1942. “Clint Welborn is Attacked by Negro at His Dairy,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 18, 1942; “Negro Assassin of Clint Welborn Is Now in Custody,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 1942.

man, the people of Jones County expected a jury to find Wash guilty and sentence him to death.⁴⁷

As the trial neared in October, the mob mentality in the Central Piney Woods awakened. On October 12, three whites barged into the Jones County jail where Wash had resided since his arrest. They demanded that Deputy Welch deliver Welborn's accused killer to them. When Welch refused, the men left, apparently deciding to allow justice to take its course. That same day, a white mob in Shubuta—a town in east Mississippi 42 miles from Laurel—abducted two black 14-year-olds, Charlie Lang and Ernest Green, from the Clarke County jail and lynched them. Local authorities had arrested the two teenagers the previous Tuesday on suspicion of attempted rape of a 13-year-old white girl. According to law enforcement, Green and Lang pled guilty to the charges on Saturday. On Sunday, the mob hanged them from the Shubuta railroad bridge. Within days, the New York NAACP office received an anonymous note from someone in Mississippi requesting the organization investigate.⁴⁸

The murder of teenagers outraged civil rights leaders. The NAACP dispatched a telegram to President Roosevelt that lambasted the brutal murder of two young teens as a

⁴⁷ First quote, "Reward Is Offered For Capture of Fugitive Negro," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 20, 1942; second quote, "Seven Negroes are Rounded up in Hunt for Fugitive," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 21, 1942; third quote, "Negro Assassin of Clint Welborn is Now in Custody," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 1942. "Clint Welborn is Dead Result of Head Wounds," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 20, 1942; FBI Report, November 4, 1942, Wash FBI File, # 44-661-5, 24-25.

⁴⁸ State Troops Placed On Guard After Negro Howard Wash Taken From Jail and Lynched," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 1942; "Two Negro Boys Lynched on Shubuta Bridge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 12, 1942; "Governor Johnson After Lynchers of Shubuta Negroes," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 13, 1942; Anonymous letter, to the NAACP, New York, October 12, 1942, Pt. 7, Ser. A-II, Reel 27, NAACP Papers.

despicable act that damaged America's reputation in the world and demoralized its war effort. President Roosevelt, the NAACP demanded, must condemn the murders and support the passage of an anti-lynching law. The CIO sent a telegram to U. S. Attorney General Francis Biddle denouncing the lynching as a "monstrous crime against human rights and national unity," and implored the U. S. Congress to pass an anti-lynching bill. Back in Mississippi, Governor Johnson publicly pledged to use his gubernatorial powers to bring to justice the killers of Lang and Green. The murderers, Johnson declared, stained Mississippi's reputation and "the better class of people here condemn this wrong." Johnson emphasized that he had prevented several lynchings during his three years in office and would have prevented the killing of Green and Lang had the sheriff warned him that a lynch mob was forming.⁴⁹

While Johnson sought to quash the bad publicity, Jones County authorities began the prosecution of Howard Wash. Likely concerned about a lynching, Judge Collins warned the crowded courtroom to refrain from engaging in any disorderly behavior as such conduct would infringe upon the right of the defendant to a fair trial. County Attorney Swartzfager and District Attorney Curie prosecuted Wash on first-degree murder charges and claimed that he had brutally beat Welborn with a six gallon milk bucket. They introduced the badly damaged container as evidence, and two doctors confirmed that Welborn suffered from a series of severe wounds to his head, face, and

⁴⁹ First quote, CIO to Attorney General Francis Biddle, October 13, 1942, Pt. 7, Ser. A-II, Reel, 27, NAACP Papers; second quote, "Governor Deplores Lynching," *Hattiesburg American*, October 13, 1942. NAACP to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, October 16, 1942, Pt. 7, Ser. A-II, Reel, 37, NAACP Papers; "Governor Johnson After Lynchers of Shubuta Negroes," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 13, 1942; "Lynching Incenses Mississippi Governor," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 14, 1942; Governor Paul Johnson Sr. to Vito Marcantonio, October 14, 1942, Pt. 7, Ser. A-II, Reel, 27, NAACP Papers.

body. Welborn's daughter testified that on the morning of the attack, she heard her father repeatedly shouting at Wash to come to work. A little while later, she heard her father speaking with Wash and firing him. She then heard three thudding sounds and a "gurgling noise." Flozine, Wash's daughter, stated that she heard sounds of an argument and a scuffle occurring in the barn and then a thudding sound, which she surmised was the milk bucket hitting something. Both Flozine and her brother Howard, Jr., recalled their father rushing into the house to change his shoes before fleeing the Welborn farm.⁵⁰

When Wash took the stand, he claimed that he killed Welborn in self-defense. According to Wash, on the night before the attack, he stayed out late and slept past his work hour. Welborn awakened him when he shouted toward his house demanding he come to work, but Wash ignored him and remained in bed. When he finally rose and entered the barn carrying three buckets, Welborn cursed him for his tardiness and tried to hit him with a shovel. Wash tried to protect himself by throwing up his buckets and theorized that he may have hit Welborn accidentally. He fled the barn and ran home where he changed his clothes. He implied to his son that he would never return. Wash insisted that he never harbored any ill-feelings toward Welborn and claimed that they had always shared a civil relationship. However, prosecutors pointed out that Wash had told police that Welborn was a harsh employer. Although several local whites believed Wash

⁵⁰ Quoting "Negro Accused in Clint Welborn Murder On Trial," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 15, 1942. "Negro Accused in Welborn Case Tells His Story," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1942.

acted in self-defense, because he admitted that he hit Welborn only once, an assertion belied by Welborn's multiple wounds, his testimony lacked credibility.⁵¹

Jurors—all white males—ignored Saul's pleas to find Wash guilty of manslaughter, and instead, convicted him of murder. Yet during the sentencing phase of their deliberation, several jurors, likely convinced that Wash acted in self-defense, refused to vote in favor of execution. Judge Collins sentenced Wash to life in prison, as stipulated by Mississippi law when juries disagreed on punishment. At least one white man attending the trial believed that Welborn precipitated the attack when he tried to assault Wash with a shovel. The jury, he insisted, should have found Wash guilty of manslaughter, not murder. He became a confidential informant for the FBI and is known only as T-2. Several locals described the Welborn family and its large network of relatives and friends as a "hot-headed" clan with a "vindictive nature." During the trial, Saul tried again to persuade the Welborns—who obviously possessed great influence over local authorities—to allow Wash to plead guilty in exchange for a life sentence rather than execution. They refused. Rumors quickly spread that the Welborn clan would not accept the sentence. They wanted Wash dead. The Welborns found substantial support in their community. In the minds of many whites, Wash had not only committed a crime against Clint Welborn and his family but a reprehensible offense against the sacred world of white supremacy when he dared to attack a white man.⁵²

⁵¹ "Negro Accused in Welborn Case Tells His Story," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1942.

⁵² Quoting FBI Report, December 31, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-13, 7, *Ibid.*, 4-11. FBI Report, November 4, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-5, 24-25; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

Racial tension grew palpable in Jones County as the Welborn clan spread talk of lynching Wash. Considering such threats, combined with the atmosphere created by the lynching of Green and Lang four days earlier, state and local authorities should have moved Wash to the fortified Jackson jail to protect him. They did nothing. Seven hours after Judge Collins sentenced Wash to life in prison and remanded him to the county jail, a mob hovered around the Jones County jail, abducted Wash, and executed their own Mississippi justice. Several hours later, state troopers dispatched by Johnson found Wash's body dangling from Welborn Bridge. Governor Johnson ordered the troopers and a special investigator to look quickly into the killing, and Sheriff Reddoch sent his deputies to round up the mob members. Before sunrise, authorities began delivering suspects to the jailhouse. Governor Johnson also heeded a request by Judge Collins and ordered Lieutenant Colonel James L. Davis, the Adjutant General of the State of Mississippi, to lead the Mississippi National Guard, armed with tear gas, riot guns, and hand grenades to Jones County to guard the suspected lynchers. To prevent more lynchings, authorities moved five black inmates to a jail in Jackson.⁵³

Initially, it appeared that Mississippi might actually punish the lynchers. Concerned that a third lynching in a week would generate bad publicity, Governor Johnson ordered Judge Collins to convene the grand jury. Johnson vowed to use his power to bring Wash's killers to justice. Sheriff Reddoch worked with Special Investigator John Byrd to investigate the crime. Reddoch knew most of the men in Jones

⁵³ "Governor Aiding All in Power to Get Lynchers," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 1942; "State Troopers Placed on Guard After Negro Howard Wash Taken From Jail and Lynched," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 1942; FBI Report, April 10, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-31, 4-6; "5 Negroes Moved to City Jail After Laurel Lynching," *Jackson Daily News*, October 18, 1942.

County, and he recognized many of the mob members. He identified three individuals immediately, Barney Jones, Nathaniel T. Shotts, and William Oscar Johnson, and he arrested them. After the arrests, Byrd noticed that Reddoch received several phone calls from people criticizing the investigation. When Reddoch agreed to meet with one of the callers at the Pinehurst Hotel, Byrd followed the sheriff and observed him in a heated conversation with three powerful businessmen from Laurel. After the meeting, Reddoch, an elected official, reversed his attitude about the lynching and stopped arresting suspects. He informed Byrd that local businessmen “advised me to go slow on this.” Instead of charging Shotts, Jones, and Johnson with murder as he had promised, he lowered the charges to intimidating an officer and released them on bond. On October 19, the grand jury not only failed to indict a single member of the mob, but its report neglected even to mention the lynching. Without formal indictments, the state could not try the defendants.⁵⁴

America’s involvement in World War II prevented Washington D. C. from reacting with its usual disregard for black life and southern injustice. Diplomats warned the U. S. government that the Japanese minister in Berlin possessed “pictures and evidence concerning the ill-treatment of negroes” and that the foreign office planned to use them for propaganda purposes. Although Japanese officials only occasionally mentioned American racism in their propaganda campaigns, oppression of blacks, particularly lynchings, certainly undermined at home and abroad America’s assertions of

⁵⁴ FBI Report, November 4, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-15, 5; *Ibid.*, 3-4. For the lesser charges and release of lynchers, see, “Governor Aiding All in Power to Get Lynchers,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 1942; FBI Report, April 10, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-31, 5; “Grand Jury Still in Session Monday Afternoon,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1942; “Grand Jury Report Fails to Mention Lynching,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 1942.

moral superiority in its fight against fascism and Nazism. Desperate to deprive foreign enemies, civil rights groups, and the national and the international press of evidence that America tolerated injustice, federal officials responded quickly. On October 19, Attorney General Biddle ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to investigate the three lynchings and pledged that if the FBI developed a case against the perpetrators, his office would tenaciously prosecute. Assistant Attorney General Wendell Burge reminded FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that President Roosevelt desired immediate investigations, public reports, and aggressive prosecutions. On October 21, Hoover dispatched a team to Laurel.⁵⁵

While the FBI focused on Laurel, NAACP investigator Madison S. Jones, Jr. launched a thorough investigation into the Shubuta lynchings. The FBI neglected to imbue the Shubuta investigation with much fervor, likely because the killing involved alleged sexual relations between black males and a white female, which enraged the South like no other violation of racial mores. The lynching was far more brutal than the Wash murder. The mob castrated the teenagers and ripped at their flesh with pliers. One of the lynchers rammed a screwdriver into the throat of one of the boys until it protruded from his neck. During the NAACP investigation, Jones discovered that Green and Lang had been friends with the white girl and that the three of them often met under the

⁵⁵ Quoting Summaries and Transcripts of the Top Secret Diplomatic Communications of Japan, 1938-1945, *The Magic Documents* (Washington D. C.: University Publications of America Inc., 1980), Microfilm, Reel, 1, 604. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 208. For orders to investigate, see, J. Edgar Hoover to Communications Section, October 21, 1942, Wash FBI File 44-661-2. On the thoroughness of investigation, see entire Howard Wash FBI File. Wendell Berge to Director J. Edgar Hoover, October 19, 1942, Wash FBI File 44-661-1; "Lynching Probe Ordered by F. B. I. Now Ordered by US," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 1942; "Races: Unusual & Different Punishment," *Time Magazine*, January 25, 1943, 24.

Shubuta Bridge. On the day authorities accused the teenagers of rape, a passing motorist saw Green, Lang, and the white girl running near the bridge. The investigation suggested that the attempted rape report was a lie spun by persons close to the white girl to protect her reputation. The NAACP forwarded Jones' report to the FBI, but the investigation floundered. The murderers of Lang and Green eluded justice.⁵⁶

At the least, the FBI launched a thorough investigation in the Wash case, and the NAACP publicized the recent lynchings to awaken the national conscience to black oppression and to reinvigorate its anti-lynching bill campaign. Assistant Secretary of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, sent a telegram to the White House arguing that the lynchings sabotaged the war effort. Nothing enraged 13 million blacks more than a lynching, and nothing helped the Axis powers more in their propaganda campaign. Wilkins, along with special counsel for the NAACP Thurgood Marshall, implored NAACP branch officers to intensify their efforts to promote the passage of the anti-lynching bill pending in the judiciary committee of the U. S. House of Representatives. Wilkins also called on them to pressure Governor Johnson into facilitating the prosecution of the lynchers and to demand that President Roosevelt publicly denounce the killings. The NAACP Tri-City Branch President in Illinois Leon R. Harris sent a telegram to Congressman Anton J. Johnson asserting that the recent lynchings had so damaged black morale that the average black would prefer to donate "\$5 to bomb a mob of Mississippi lynchers than to donate 5 cents to bomb a regiment of Japs or Germans." Editorials and articles in the NAACP's

⁵⁶ Madison Jones to Walter White, November 7, 1942; NAACP to the Department of Justice, November 9, 1942, both in Pt. 7, Ser. A-II, Reel 27, NAACP Papers.

national paper, *The Crisis*, noted that the lynchings helped Japan convince the millions of colored people living in Asia to turn against the United States.⁵⁷

Organizations, leaders, and citizens across the nation responded with outrage to the killings and demanded the punishment of the Mississippi lynchers. Groups as different from each other as the Workers Defense League in New York and the Young Women's Christian Association in Youngstown, Ohio sent letters to Mississippi leaders and the FBI that stressed the hypocrisy of fighting in a war against tyranny abroad while practicing despotism at home. On October 25, 1943, 2,000 blacks and trade unionists attended a mass meeting at Salem Methodist Church in Harlem at which the executive secretary for the Negro Labor Victory Committee argued that President Roosevelt must call lynching "treason to the nation." New York Congressman Joseph Gavagan circulated a petition to move the proposed anti-lynching bill out of the U. S. Senate Judiciary Committee and onto floor. A. Philip Randolph, who had organized the March on Washington Movement, led a protest of the lynchings at New York City Hall. In Louisiana, a black soldier stationed at Camp Polk sent a letter to *The Pittsburgh Courier* declaring that if white men wanted to win the war, they must depend, in part, on the patriotism of the millions of American blacks. He requested: "tell the white people for us,

⁵⁷ Quoting "Brand Lynching as Unpatriotic," *Daily Dispatch*, October 23, 1942; Telegram Roy Wilkins to the White House; Thurgood Marshall to NAACP Branch Officers, October 19, 1942; Roy Wilkins to NAACP Branch Officers, October 19, 1942, all in Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 27, NAACP Papers. Editorial, "Three For Hitler," *The Crisis*, 50 (November 1942): 343; Editorial, "Lynching—Usual Aftermath," *The Crisis*, 42 (December 1942): 375.

sir, that lynching, segregation and discrimination to people because of color, definitely does not help their cause.”⁵⁸

Some local white and black citizens in Mississippi even condemned the lynching—a rare occurrence in the white police state. Unlike the NAACP, however, they praised the governor’s response. In an open letter to Governor Johnson published in *The Clarion-Ledger*, the 59 white and 12 black signatories lauded the Governor for his efforts to find and punish the lynchers. They applauded his use of the term “murder” to describe the crime, as such language conveyed to the perpetrators that their actions violated a person’s right to due process and equal protection of the law. Johnson’s bold denunciation of the crime, the signatories argued, assured them that the South would never become a “bridgehead of fascism in America.” It also strengthened the morale of the large number of allies of “colored races” and damaged the efforts of the Axis powers to use such crimes as propaganda. They concluded that if the local district attorney failed to prosecute the killers, the state attorney general must intervene.⁵⁹

Even in the Central Piney Woods, voices of protest emerged from moderate whites. The Baptist Ministers’ Association of Southeast Mississippi passed a resolution that condemned lynchings, demanded the return to law and order, and pledged to support

⁵⁸ First quote, Eugene Gordon, “2,000 in Harlem Say: Act Against Lynchers,” *The Daily Worker*, October 26, 1942, Wash FBI File, # 44-661-8; second quote, Merle R. Monroe, “Soldier Writes a Letter to White America,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 14, 1942. A. Philip Randolph to NAACP Branch Offices, November 4, 1942; CIO Press Release, November 14, 1942, both in, Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 27, NAACP Papers. “Workers’ Defense League Asks Action in Lynching,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1942; The Young Woman’s Christian Association, Felmont Branch, Ohio to J Edgar Hoover, January 15, 1943, in Wash FBI File, # 44-661-9.

⁵⁹ “A Letter of Commendation to Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr.,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, November 14, 1942, Pt. 7, Ser. A, Reel 27, NAACP Papers.

justice. The editors of the *Laurel Leader-Call* expressed humiliation its employees experienced over having to confirm to media outlets across the nation that the third lynching in a week had indeed occurred in their county. Although they emphasized that Wash had killed a man, which merited the sobriquet “brutal murderer,” they insisted that Mississippians must respect the legal system that sentenced Wash to life for his crime. They called on Jones Countians “to restore law and order in Jones County” by cooperating in the investigation to find the lynchers, testifying before the grand jury, and deferring to the legal system. They characterized the majority of Laurel residents as law abiding people who suffered great shame and sorrow over Wash’s murder. Such citizens expressed their outrage that 100 men chose to defy the law that so many soldiers died overseas to protect.⁶⁰

Most white Mississippians, however, lacked such enlightened views. New York *P.M. Daily* reporter Victor Bernstein traveled to Mississippi and searched for the indignant citizens in Jones County. A local Laurel businessman justified the lynching by claiming that the “niggers” had caused trouble lately by becoming intoxicated “like they do on Saturday nights,” and they engaged in “shootings and stabbings.” When young white men had gone off to war, they left white women unprotected and vulnerable to attack by black males. Sometimes, the businessman insisted, lynchings proved necessary “to keep the niggers in their place.” Besides, he noted, the northerners aggravated Mississippians with all their righteous speeches. He concluded: “we could settle our own

⁶⁰ “Baptist Ministers Condemn Mob and Liquor Traffic,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1942; “This is A Crisis,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1942.

problems fine if you'd leave us alone," but he failed to offer any solutions to the race problem.⁶¹

Governor Johnson and Judge Collins expressed the common sentiment among most conservative whites. Johnson emphasized that he had used all his power to ensure a thorough investigation of the killings, and he welcomed the FBI investigation. Northerners, however, failed to understand how people in Mississippi "felt" about "Negroes." No white southerner would sit at a table and eat with a Negro: "we'd rather die first." Why, he wondered did northerners fail to understand that "our feelings toward the Negro are our own business We're a very proud people in the South." Johnson insisted that Mississippi had the right to handle "our own problems, our own way." Of course, Mississippi was not handling it at all. Judge Collins proclaimed that Wash received a fair trial but failed to explain why a white jury refused to sentence a black man to death for murdering a white man and avoided discussing the possibility that Wash had acted in self-defense. Collins conceded that he considered the lynching a murder, but as he had seven other murder cases in his small district, he lacked the time to convene a jury in the Wash case. Not even a local minister who expressed more moderate racial views dared castigate the lynching. Although he agreed that the lynching marred the reputation of Jones County and damaged the war effort, he lacked the courage to condemn the murder in his sermons. He surely understood that such a bold stance in the white supremacist town would invite white disdain and possibly reprisals.⁶²

⁶¹ Victor H. Bernstein, "The Story of 3 Lynchings-And How Mississippi Does Nothing About Them Is Another Matter," n. d., stamped October 28, Wash FBI File, #44-661-A.

⁶² Ibid.

Local journalists resented the interference of outsiders. The day after *The Laurel Leader-Call* editors printed its editorial condemning the lynching, it published another article “This Is Our Problem,” which criticized northern groups for urging the federal government to intervene. The editors argued that northerners should focus on problems in their own states, and they emphasized that these intrusions by outsiders merely generated hostility toward the Wash investigation. They insisted: “we believe that Mississippi will work out her own salvation.” Other Mississippians condemned Governor Johnson for his cooperation with the federal government. An article in the *Jackson Daily News*, “Take Us Over Yankees!” denounced northern interference as abhorrent to Mississippians, criticized Governor Johnson for welcoming the invasion, and called the efforts to pass the anti-lynching law ridiculous. The writer concluded simply that “because two depraved negro youths were lynched for attempting to rape a 13 year old white girl in Clarke County, and a mob speedily disposed of a brutal murderer in Jones County after a chicken-hearted jury had failed to give the criminal a death sentence, Gov. Johnson is seemingly willing to tell the negro-petting Yankees and racial agitators of the North to come on in and take charge of our government. Mississippi is not willing to surrender her sovereignty.”⁶³

Although most whites, whether radical, conservative, or moderate, perceived the arrival of the FBI in Jones County as a great threat to that sovereignty and generally closed ranks against the invasion, as agents spread out across Jones County in search of information leading them to the killers, they found a few whites and several blacks

⁶³ First and second quotes, “This is Our Problem,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 1942; all other quotes, “Take Us Over Yankees!” *Jackson Daily News*, October 21, 1942.

willing to talk to them privately. Over the next six months, the FBI team investigating the Wash murder conducted interviews, reconstructed the night of the lynching, and built a case. When agents tracked down Wash's fellow inmates at the time of his abduction, they acquired significant details about Wash's last hours alive and the premeditation of the mob. On the day prior to Wash's sentencing, he told a fellow inmate, Lonnie McNair, that he never intended to kill his boss, though he admitted to striking him with the milk bucket after Welborn tried to beat him with a shovel. Wash prayed that the judge would spare him from the electric chair and sentence him to life in prison. McNair asked Wash if he feared that a white mob would come for him. Wash assumed that they likely desired to lynch him, but he believed that the authorities would protect him. After Wash received a life sentence, several white people visited the colored cellblock. McNair surmised that the men came to locate Wash so that they could return later and abduct him. Wash grew fearful. That evening, prisoners watched a sad exchange transpire between Wash and his wife, Louise, when the jailers permitted her to see her husband for five minutes. She brought only two of their eight children, two-year-old little Louise and six-month-old Annie Slee. While they visited, Louise asked her husband if he had been praying; he assured her that he had. He gave her \$3.00 and asked her to raise their eight children "the best she could." Wash told his wife sadly that "a man wasn't born to live forever." He kissed his baby and bid his family goodbye. Louise left the jailhouse in tears. Wash watched her go, and then he lay down on his cot and never moved again until the mob came for him.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Quoting FBI Report, December 31, 1942, Wash FBI File, # 44-661-13, 4, 32, *Ibid.*, 3, 33. FBI Report, March 30, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-43, 2.

After speaking with several prisoners, the agents focused their attention on the jailer, Luther Holder, and several members of the Welborn clan. They suspected Holder willingly unlocked the jail and led the mob to Wash. According to some of the prisoners, hours after the lynching, Holder returned to the cellblock and told the prisoners, "That was too bad about Wash but I couldn't help it because they had a gun in my ribs." McNair informed the agents, "I wish to state that I didn't see the two fellows holding any gun in Mr. Holder's ribs the morning when they took Wash. I didn't see any gun displayed at all." Agents also honed their sights on the Welborn clan when a person close to the Welborn family, identified only as informant T-1, told the FBI that the Welborn clan planned to lynch Wash if the jury failed to sentence him to death. T-1 overheard Welborn's brother, Hillyer, and his widow, Martha, discuss plans to murder Wash. One day during the trial, T-1 asked Martha if a life sentence would satisfy her. No. She desired "every ounce of Wash's blood," just like Shylock from the Shakespearean play, *Merchant of Venice*. He also heard that Hillyer supplied his vehicle to transport Wash to the scene of the lynching. Agents interviewed several members of the Welborn clan, hoping to acquire a confession from one of them. They received a break in the case on November 25, when Allen Welborn Pryor, Clint Welborn's third cousin, informed them that the men had planned the lynching from the moment the court failed to deliver the death sentence. Around 10:00 p.m., the Welborns gathered with nearly 100 white men outside a store in the Shady Grove Community and planned the lynching. Pryor wrote a detailed confession, explaining how they rushed the sheriff, broke into the jail, abducted Wash, and hung him over the Welborn Bridge. From his confession, the prisoners' statements, and the cooperation of the sheriff and several of his deputies, the FBI began

to piece together the crime. FBI agents questioned Barney Jones, Nathaniel T. Shotts, William Oscar Johnson, and Hillyer Welborn. All of the men denied that they lynched Wash.⁶⁵

On January 13, 1943, a federal grand jury at Jackson, Mississippi returned two indictments charging Shotts, Pryor, Jones, and Johnson with unlawfully conspiring to induce state officers to deprive Wash of his rights to “due process of law, to deny him equal protection under the law, and to inflict upon him unusual and different punishment because of his race and color.” In addition, the grand jury charged the defendants with violating Wash’s constitutional rights by inducing Holder to turn over Wash to the lynch mob. The grand jury also charged Deputy Sheriff Holder with willfully and unlawfully surrendering Wash while “acting under the color of law.” The first counts carried a maximum penalty of a \$5,000 fine and a 10-year jail sentence; the second count against Holder stipulated a maximum \$1,000 fine and a one year prison sentence.⁶⁶

The indictments represented a watershed in racial justice in Mississippi. It was the first time the federal government had intervened in a lynching case in the state since Reconstruction and in the South in general for 40 years. At the least, it set a precedent for federal intervention in future racial killings. Only once had a Mississippi court indicted a law officer in a lynching, and in that 1925 case, the punishment had been a small fine.

⁶⁵ First quote, FBI Report, March 30, 1943, Wash FBI File, #441-661-43, 3; second quote, FBI Report, December 31, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-13, 5. Allen Welborn Pryor, confession; William Oscar Johnson, statement; Barney Lamar Jones and Nathaniel Shotts, statements; Tom Watson, statement, all attached to FBI Report, December 1, 1942, Wash FBI File, #44-661-10, 7-11, 18-23.

⁶⁶ Indictments of Luther Holder, Nathaniel Shotts, Allen Pryor, Barney Jones, William Oscar Johnson, January 13, 1943, attached to Department of Justice Release, January 12, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-61-20, 1-2 and in R. J. Untreiner to J. Edgar Hoover, January 14, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-11.

Still, some people even held out hope that the indictments in the Wash case may actually result in convictions. After all, Governor Johnson had pledged to find and punish the killers, the grand jury had indicted five men, and the *Laurel Leader-Call* had originally condemned the lynching. A reporter for *Time Magazine* noted that “a new spirit was stirring among some of Mississippi’s thoughtful citizens about America’s worst national disgrace, and chances this week seem better than ever that complaisant Deputy Sheriff Holder and the lynch mob might really feel the hand of the law they had flouted.”⁶⁷

The indictment failed to reflect the general white perspective in Mississippi, which disapproved of federal intervention and generally accepted the lynching as a tolerable response to a black man who dared to harm a white man—even if he may have done so in self-defense. The lynching disturbed few white Laurel citizens and even those citizens expected an acquittal. Local whites even raised funds to help the defense pay costs of housing witnesses. Most Mississippi politicians, community leaders, and newspapers also opposed the indictments. On March 24, 1943, Representative John E. Rankin stood before the congress and compared the Department of Justice to the Nazi Gestapo; he condemned federal authorities for yanking the five men out of their homes and charging them in federal court for a state infraction. Many local lawyers viewed the indictments as a violation of states’ rights and an “invasion.” The editors of the *Jackson Daily News* characterized the investigation as an effort by the federal government to

⁶⁷ Quoting “Races: Unusual & Different Punishment,” *Time*, January 25, 1943, 24. Kenneth Toller, “Three Are Acquitted In Mob-Lynching Case,” Howard Wash Lynching, Crimes—Violent Vertical Files, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM]; “U.S. Grand Jury Meets, May Probe Jones Lynching,” *Jackson Daily News*, January 13, 1943; “Open Lynching Trial of Five In Mississippi,” *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1943. For the 1925 indictment of a law enforcement officer, see McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 249-250.

usurp the state court's jurisdiction. In contrast, *The Pittsburg Courier* editors mocked white Mississippians for carping that the FBI invasion was "un-American," and they noted the surprise of white locals "when the alleged lynchers were actually brought to trial just as if Mississippi were a free and democratic country where the life, liberty and happiness of all were guaranteed."⁶⁸

The case spilled over into Forrest County because the Department of Justice tried the men in the federal courthouse in Hattiesburg. When the trial began on April 20, 1943, attorneys selected jurors from the federal district pool covering 60 counties. National and local press along with local people flocked to the trial. So many black people came that they had to stand against the back wall. The black masses never demonstrated or sent letters condemning the killing to the local newspaper. Instead, blacks from the Central Piney Woods expressed their protest by their silent and dignified presence, all the more symbolic of the oppression of Jim Crow—invisible in the public debate but visible in their quiet courtroom attendance. The federal government dismissed charges against Shotts and Johnson, claiming a lack of evidence; however, the prosecuting team, which included Civil Liberties Division attorney Frank Coleman, District Attorney Toxey Hall, and Mississippi attorneys Will H. Watkins, Stewart Broom, and John Savage, presented a

⁶⁸ First quote, "U.S. Grand Jury Meets, May Probe Jones Lynching," *Jackson Daily News*, January 13, 1943; all other quotes, "Un-Americanism in Mississippi," *The Pittsburg Courier*, May 1, 1943. D. M. Ladd to J. Edgar Hoover, March 27, 1943, Wash FBI File, #44-661-42; "Races: Unusual & Different Punishment," *Time*, January 25, 1943, 24; "U.S. To Defray Costs," *The Commercial Appeal*, April 15, 1943, in Howard Wash Lynching File, Crimes—Violent Vertical File, LRM.

powerful case against the remaining three defendants—Luther Holder, Allen Pryor and Barney Jones.⁶⁹

When Sheriff Reddoch took the stand and identified Pryor and Jones as members of the mob that abducted Wash, he shocked many of the spectators. Law enforcement officers had rarely testified against lynchers, but Reddoch held more moderate racial views than his fellow townspeople; and apparently he decided that justice was more important than his reelection, for he summoned the courage to defy the conservatives and radicals. Reddoch stated that Pryor and Jones demanded he surrender the jail keys, but he refused, claiming his job required him to protect the prisoner and declaring that he would die before he would give them the keys. The sheriff explained how the crowd manipulated him into relinquishing his gun and stormed the jailhouse. Still, he emphatically declared that the men could never have entered the jail's cellblock without keys because no mob could break through the solid steel door. During cross-examination of Jailor Luther Holder, prosecutors showed that Holder abetted the mob by failing to abide by Reddoch's orders to hide his jail keys. Although Holder insisted that the mob forced him at gunpoint to unlock the jail and Wash's cell, he failed to identify a single member of the unmasked members of the lynching party.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mary Southard, "On Trial For Lynching," *The Daily Worker*, May 9, 1943; "Defense Plea Fails," *The Meridian Star*, April 22, 1943; "Identify Two Men in Mob That Lynched Negro," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 21, 1943; "Open Lynching Trial of Five In Mississippi," *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1943.

⁷⁰ Mary Southard, "On Trial For Lynching," *The Daily Worker*, May 9, 1943; "Defense Plea Fails," *The Meridian Star*, April 22, 1943; "Identify Two Men in Mob That Lynched Negro," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 21, 1943; "Open Lynching Trial of Five In Mississippi," *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1943; "Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial," *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943; "Acquit 3 Held in Miss. Lynching," *The Daily Worker*, April 2,

The prosecution had hoped to present several of Wash's fellow black inmates as eye-witnesses to identify the defendants and to testify that Holder allowed the mob into the jail. However, as these potential witnesses feared violent repercussions should they so boldly condemn white men in court, all but one of them refused to appear. The sole black prisoner to testify, Mack Lewis, explained that he saw men enter the cellblock and abduct Wash, but the darkness prevented him from identifying them. The refusal of the prisoners to identify mob members or publicly counter Holder's testimony showed that Laurel remained a town of "lynchings and hangings" despite the war imperative and the intervention of the FBI. The lynching of Howard Wash had certainly reminded blacks that they lacked the right to defend themselves and that the absolutist society in which they lived still dictated their very existence. Still, the state still possessed a damning piece of evidence—Allen Pryor's six page confession in which he admitted to participating in the lynching party that abducted and hanged Wash. Taking the stand in his own defense, Pryor contended that FBI agents coerced him into signing a false confession. FBI Agents John L. Sullivan and Otis Brashier denied such charges. They testified that Pryor voluntarily delivered the statement without coercion or promise of any reward. The strategy of claiming the FBI coerced false confessions to frame defenseless southern whites became quite popular, particularly in the 1960s, rendering it difficult to acquire convictions. The southern belief in the dangers of federal despotism and their perception

1943; "Defense In Lynching Trial Is Completed and Arguments of Counsel Slated Friday Eve," *The Laurel Leader-Call*, April 23, 1943.

of Reconstruction as reflective of federal tendencies toward tyranny instilled in them a distrust of Washington and all things federal.⁷¹

During closing arguments, the defense team of Earle Wingo, Ed Franklin, Andrew Scott, and Ellis Cooper capitalized on that distrust when they turned the case into a defense of white supremacy and southern autonomy. Lead defense lawyer, Earle Wingo, focused on the typical states rights argument contending, “The people of this great Southland are on trial. . . .This is not a trial to vindicate the lynching of Howard Wash, the Negro, nor is it a trial only to convict the three defendants.” Rather, it was an attempted “invasion of state rights.” Wingo compared the trial to the “so called anti-lynching bill” introduced by blacks and the malevolent effort to abolish the poll tax. He lauded the “red-blooded Senators,” who blocked these bills. Southerners, he declared, found themselves in a dilemma as they had learned from their fathers a sense of loyalty to the Democratic Party because it had “maintained our heritage of white supremacy and the perpetual preservation of states’ rights.” But he intimated that the non-southern wing of the party had begun to turn on the South by supporting civil rights legislation. Wingo expressed concern about the impact of this trial in Mississippi, where blacks might soon become the majority race. He warned the jurors that if they set a precedent by “giving sanction to this abortive attempt to deprive us of our right as a sovereign state [,] we can

⁷¹ Quoting James Nix interview by Sarah Rowe, MOHP Digital. Mary Southard, “On Trial For Lynching,” *The Daily Worker*, May 9, 1943; Mississippi Jury Refuses to Convict,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1943; “Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial,” *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943; Edgar Poe, “U.S. Drops Count Against 2 in Case,” *The Times Picayune*, April 22, 1943, Howard Wash Lynching, Crimes-Violent Vertical File, LRM. For examples of alleged coerced confessions by defendants in later civil rights cases see, Cecil Sessum affidavit, James K. Dukes Collection, McCain, USM and Deavours Nix affidavit in Judge W.O. “Chet” Dillard, *Clearburning: Civil Rights-Civil Wrongs* (Jackson: Lawyer’s Publishing Press), 180-181.

then expect many more prosecutions when it meets the pleasure of those who seek to further centralize power in Washington.”⁷²

The defense further relied upon the southern white fear of racial equality and communism. Attorney Ed Franklin employed red-baiting tactics when he argued that the case centered on the question of “social equality,” a core principal of communists. He warned that a conviction in the case would prove a legal victory for the communist party because legal equality would force social and political equality among the races. He emphasized that blacks and whites in Mississippi accepted their place in society, and he declared that whites would never allow racial equity. Attorney Andrew Scott proclaimed, “we intend to have in the South white supremacy until Gabriel blows his horn.” Finally, Cooper and Wingo invoked the white South’s historical memory of Reconstruction by paralleling the federal government’s case against the lynchers with the humiliations southerners faced under the North’s invasion and domination of the South during the 1860s and 1870s. They emphasized that the North forced the South to adopt the Fourteenth Amendment, and the federal government was trying to use that amendment in this case to punish the lynchers. In essence, they asked the jury to rebel against the latest invasion of the federal government by refusing to adhere to the amendment their forefathers never accepted.⁷³

⁷² First and second quotes, “Mississippi Jury Refuses to Convict in Lynch Case,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1943; all other quotes, “Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial,” *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943. “Open Lynching Trial of Five In Mississippi,” *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1943; “Acquit 3 Held in Miss. Lynching,” *The Daily Worker*, April 25, 1943.

⁷³ First quote, “Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial,” *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943; second

Assuming the counteroffensive, the prosecutors declared that the lynching of Howard Wash threatened American democracy, and they invoked the contemporary war—the fight against fascism and Nazism—to appeal to the jury. Hall likened the lynching to “Hitlerism,” arguing that Mississippians must view the federal investigation as an effort to “uphold,” rather than invade, Mississippi’s sovereignty. Broom asserted that the Axis powers could use the lynching as propaganda against the Allies, and Watkins contended that the United States must prove it stood for democracy and despised oppression. Watkins tried to show that America would appear hypocritical if it fought to end oppression abroad while it allowed lynchings—a powerful symbol of oppression—of blacks at home. If the jurors refused to convict, they would jeopardize the rights of American citizens to law enforcement protection. Finally, he informed the jury that they had an opportunity to erase the stain of lynching from Mississippi by delivering a historic decision upholding human rights. Hall, trying to deflate the defense’s claims of a Yankee invasion in the case, emphasized that Wash was tried in a state court in a “white man’s country, [where] white men ruled the proceedings, a white judge presided, a white jury tried the Negro and a white Sheriff had him in his charge.” He reminded the court that the white jury decided against sentencing Wash to death, but the Welborn clan and friends refused to accept the life sentence. He concluded “if there had been any justice and any honor in this deed, it would have been done openly. It has been said that when deeds are dark, then dark and shadows are the cloak for dark and damnable crimes.”⁷⁴

quote, “Acquit 3 Held in Miss. Lynching,” *The Worker*, April 25, 1943. “Mississippi Jury Refuses to Convict in Lynch Case,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1943.

⁷⁴ First and second quotes, Mary Southard, “On Trial For Lynching,” *The Daily Worker*, May 9, 1943; all other quotes, “Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury

The prosecution's entire case relied on the jurors agreeing that the defendants violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment when they lynched Howard Wash. Moreover, to win the case, local racist mores compelled the prosecutors to distance themselves from racially progressive sentiments and agree with the defense that the "Negro people" should forever remain inferior to whites, but inequity meant that they occupied "an unequal and therefore unconstitutional place in Southern life." They were asking the jurors to afford Wash a constitutional right to life and justice that the South denied blacks. For the next several decades, prosecutors in racial cases would find themselves in the same precarious position of seeking equal justice and simultaneously promising such justice would never produce racial equality. Certainly, some local whites opposed racial violence, but the majority remained so devoted to the white supremacist ideology that they sacrificed justice to uphold their racial caste system.⁷⁵

The all-white-male jury took two votes. During the first ballot, one man voted to convict the defendants. In the morning, the jury voted unanimously for acquittal. Surely, the dissenter faced intense pressure to change his vote. The first federal lynching trial in Mississippi since Reconstruction ended with a victory for white supremacy. The *Chicago Defender* labeled the verdict "farcical," noting that as the jurors slid into their seats, they appeared jovial, jesting with each other and winking at the defense attorneys. The black press and black leaders experienced similar disappointments when the federal government abandoned efforts to produce equal justice in similar cases across the South.

Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial," *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943.

⁷⁵ Quoting Mary Southard, "On Trial," *The Daily Worker*, May 9, 1943. For similar strategies by prosecutors in later trials see, Elliott Chaze, "Sessum is Convicted," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968.

A federal attorney, who had planned to try a Texas police officer for the murder of Private Charles J. Rico on July 28, 1942, suddenly announced plans to drop the case. The Department of Justice dropped charges against Arkansas state police officers for their attack on black troops. It also neglected to take federal action in Louisiana after a state grand jury refused to indict a state trooper for shooting a black soldier. Special counsel for the NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, criticized the Department of Justice and the war department for their failure to punish whites for assaulting and murdering blacks. *The Pittsburgh Courier* argued that the increased indictments and investigations brought attention to the cases, but as none of them resulted in convictions, they failed to produce change.⁷⁶ White supremacy continued to triumph over all threats to the racial order.

The federal agents left Mississippi after the close of the Wash case, and soon afterward, the anti-lynching bill failed to pass. White locals had preserved the southern way of life in the Magnolia State. Radicalism rued the day. And most moderates and progressives, with the few exceptions of men like Sheriff Reddoch and the FBI's anonymous white informant, fell silent. The brief intervention of the federal government failed to terminate racial injustice, though it altered the methodology of violent oppression. The official recorded number of lynchings declined in the 1940s and 1950s. The killings persisted, but moved underground. The NAACP and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching found that whites replaced the traditional "nigger hunt," with the underground "race murder." Whispered talk of "covert lynchings" emerged. Southern Tenant Farmer's

⁷⁶ Quoting "Defense Raps New Deal in Dixie Court: Jury Members Wink At Defendants In Farcical Mississippi Trial," *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1943; "Acquit 3 in Lynching," *The Meridian Star*, April 24, 1943; "Mob Violence, Atrocities Pile Up, Justice, War Department Flayed," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 8, 1943.

Union official Howard “Buck” Kester, a man who often investigated lynchings, stated that the race killings had embarked upon a “new phase” in which blacks “are dispatched quickly and without general knowledge. In some lonely swamp a small body of men do the job formerly done by a vast, howling, blood thirsty mob.”⁷⁷

The lynching of Howard Wash and its fallout failed to terminate racial violence and injustice in the South; it succeeded, however, in contributing to the slow transformation of the white supremacist-ruled region. The lynching received international attention, led to an examination of violent racism in the state and country, and exposed the hypocrisy of a nation fighting a war against despotism overseas while permitting the oppression of African Americans at home. Enraged civil rights organizations, as well as ordinary persons, voiced their opposition in national and local papers and in letters to their leaders. Their efforts forced the federal government to act in an effort to quash negative international publicity. Just as significant, the Wash case angered local blacks who showed their support for the trial by packing the courtroom.

The intervention of the federal government and the social changes the war unleashed frightened the white establishment in the Central Piney Woods. White leaders responded by remaining on constant guard against outside influence and local activism, particularly preparing themselves for the reintegration of black veterans into the Jim Crow system after the war. They grew particularly infuriated when the U. S. Congress debated the Lucas-Green-Worley bill, commonly called the Soldier Vote, which would provide America military personnel overseas with a uniform federal ballot for the 1944 election. The bill threatened an important pillar of white supremacy—black

⁷⁷ Quoting McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 252. Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 7.

disfranchisement—as it would allow black southerners, generally prohibited from voting in their hometowns, the opportunity to cast a ballot abroad. To sustain black disfranchisement in the South, two legislators from Mississippi, John Rankin and James O. Eastland, introduced a new proposal, which required each state to generate its own ballot. The War and Navy Departments, however, informed congress that the military lacked the ability to distribute 48 separate ballots. President Roosevelt denounced the proposal as a “fraud on our fighting forces.” Ultimately, southern Democrats used their power in congress to sustain local control over the federal ballot and prevent suffrage to black soldiers who hailed from the South.⁷⁸

The effort to establish the FEPC as a permanent agency equally disturbed white Mississippians. Legislators exercised all their political power against the bill and mobilized their constituencies against it. Representative Colmer even outlandishly compared the FEPC investigations to the colonial witchcraft trials and Nazism, contending that the federal inquisitions sought to punish people they suspected of engaging in discrimination. Bilbo, during his successful filibuster of the FEPC in June 1945, claimed the bill would force miscegenation upon the nation. He mocked his racially progressive colleagues when he chided: “I said to a Negro-loving Senator, What the hell are you going to do when I send them all to Africa and you haven’t got anybody to bootlick with?” In the Central Piney Woods, business owners and executives, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, the Young Men’s Business Club, and a multitude of constituents praised Bilbo’s stance against the FEPC. Part owner of the Evans-Terry

⁷⁸ Quoting Congress of Industrial Organizations, “Resolution on Soldiers’ Vote,” January 1944, Colmer Papers. Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 74.

Company Inc., T. B. Terry in Laurel contended that if the bill passed, “I am afraid that we will have another little Civil War.” J. H. Thickens, Vice President of the Masonite Corporation in Laurel, expressed alarm over the proposed legislation, asserting that it would result in “riots” and eventually place blacks in charge of whites in the labor force. Hattiesburg resident Ruth Smith nonsensically complained that whites rather than blacks suffered job discrimination. She declared that her husband, who finally found work as a chef after facing discrimination because black workers hated having a “white man in the kitchen,” found his black staff “very lippy and impudent.”⁷⁹

Many white Mississippians feared most that black soldiers, who had fought against tyranny abroad, would forcefully demand their liberty upon their return home. They worried that World War II had generated “black militancy” on the home front as well as inculcated “biggity” ideas among returning black soldiers. False rumors spread across the state that while a majority of white men were across the seas fighting, blacks stockpiled weapons in preparation for a “race war.” Many white women erroneously claimed that the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt founded “Eleanor Clubs” for black maids where they conspired to “put a white woman in every kitchen.” A Forrest County furniture store owner, A. T. Woodruff, warned Bilbo that he had read in a Philadelphia

⁷⁹ First quote, “Move to Gag Bilbo Fails for Lack of Quorum,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 1945, Bilbo Papers; second quote, T. B. Terry to William Colmer, April 28, 1945, Colmer Papers; third quote, J. H. Thickens to William Colmer, May 3, 1945, Colmer Papers; fourth and fifth quote, Claude and Ruth Smith to Bilbo, February 3, 1946, Bilbo Papers. Bilbo to Mike McElhaney, February 15, 1946, and “Action on Budget Imperiled by Bilbo’s FEPC Filibuster,” *Washington Star*, June 28, 1945, both in Bilbo Papers. Debate between Joseph Clark and William Colmer, “Should a Permanent Fair Employment Practice Commission Be Created By Congress,” *Wake Up America!* May 21, 1945, Colmer Papers; Minutes of Board of Directors, Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce, June 5, 1945, 6, HACCR; Dewey E. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region At Odds* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 182.

newspaper that “negro soldiers will get you as soon as they come from the army.”

Woodruff noted that white Mississippians trusted that Bilbo would solve the “negro situation,” and they supported him in the coming “negro fight.” Bilbo responded that if the black soldiers managed to harm him, “I will have the consolation of dying in a righteous cause.” He declared that he planned to sustain his fight to return the black populace to Africa as he perceived it as the only solution. He concluded, “We are going to have lots of trouble with the negroes when these soldier boys get back. We just as well get ready.”⁸⁰

Many blacks across the nation protested such sentiments with their pens. One anonymous correspondent called Bilbo a “fascist bastard,” and an enemy of the United States. He warned the senator that “our boys in the service are taught to kill the enemy, so you better watch out unless you want to join the same fate as Hitler and Mussilini [sic].” Most letters focused on the importance of black liberty and racial equity. The Voice of The Colored Workers of The Navy Department informed Bilbo that through education and businesses, blacks had risen in society and produced generations of intelligent adults who, when permitted, would easily compete with whites in the world. A black minister from New York informed Bilbo that “the gospel ministry to all the world is to preach the

⁸⁰ First, third, fourth, and fifth quotes, John Dittmer, *Local People* 14; *Ibid.*, 19-40; second quote, Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 13; *Ibid.*, 23-66; sixth, seventh, and eighth quotes, A. T. Woodruff to Bilbo, May 10, 1944; ninth and tenth quotes, Bilbo to Woodruff, May 20, 1944, both in Bilbo Papers. For Bilbo's many speeches regarding the resettlement of African Americans, see “Fair Employment Practice Committee, The Battle of Piccolo, Separation-Only Permanent Solution” and Speeches of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo: June 27, July 3, 6, 25, 28, 1945; Speech by Senator Theodore Bilbo, n. d.; “Voluntary Resettlement of African Negroes in Africa,” April 24, 1939; and “The Race Problem,” October 18, 1945, all in Bilbo Papers. For analysis and background on Bilbo's work on the Back to Africa Movement, see Michael Fitzgerald, “‘We Have Found Moses’: Theodore Bilbo, Black Nationalism, and the Greater Liberia Bill of 1939,” *Journal of Southern History*, 63 (May, 1997): 299-320.

Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” Bilbo responded that his Bible taught him that “God saw fit to create separate and distinct races” and that the reverend had no basis to claim God desired racial mixing and the creation of a “mongrel race.” Bilbo also commonly responded to criticism by ridiculously claiming: “I have been the Negro’s friend” or “I have not preached any hatred nor ill-will toward any race or minority group of American citizens.”⁸¹

The war hardened white supremacy, as whites perceived the ideology of the Allies as a threat to their Mississippi police state, and they determined to ensure that black soldiers accepted their second-class citizenry. When black veteran Henry Murphy returned home to Hattiesburg, he never had the opportunity to march proudly in a parade, and he knew the dangers inherent in even expressing pride in his service. He had heard stories of local police officers attacking black soldiers. To avoid such trouble, Murphy’s father met him at Camp Shelby and brought him civilian clothes. While his father drove him back to Hattiesburg, Murphy changed from his U. S. Military uniform into “overalls and a jumper, the uniform of a field hand.” Soon after the war, an African American schoolteacher in Hattiesburg, Ariel Barnes, saw a police officer directing traffic, motioning a white pedestrian to cross the road, but when a black soldier in uniform followed, the officer shouted, “Go back nigger.” Barnes later recalled, “That hurt me, you know. The boy was in uniform.” Barnes, like most Forrest County residents, determined that the war had not changed the Central Piney Woods at all. One black veteran from

⁸¹ First and second quotes, One of the Minorities to Bilbo, n. d.; third quote, Reverend John E. Bryant to Bilbo, August 25, 1945; fourth and fifth quotes, Bilbo to John E. Bryant, September 18, 1945; sixth quote, Bilbo to John W. Griffith, September 18, 1945; seventh quote, Bilbo to Mrs. Howard L. Glazer, September 18, 1945; The Voice Of The Colored Workers Of The Navy Department to Bilbo, n. d., all in Bilbo Papers.

Hattiesburg expressed a common sentiment among black soldiers when he noted, “We were fighting for what we didn’t have.”⁸²

The war failed to produce any immediate changes for the veterans or black citizens. Mixed racial residents of the Central Piney Woods such as Mable Fielder personally experienced the vast discrepancy in treatment whites and blacks received. Fielder, one of her daughters, and her sister had light complexions and strangers often considered them white. Both she and her sister also had what she called “little chocolate-colored girl[s].” After attending the circus one afternoon, the women and their children found themselves stranded when their ride home failed to arrive. They became increasingly nervous as the day turned toward dusk and the city began to darken, but then a police officer, noticing Fielder and mistaking her for a white woman, offered to take her and her family home. While in the police vehicle, Fielder and the officer engaged in a friendly discourse until her daughter with the darker complexion asked when she would see her father. When the police officer turned around to look at her, he realized that he had mulattos and blacks in his vehicle. Suddenly enraged, the policeman careened into an alley near the train station, brought the vehicle to a halt, and shouted, “Get out nigger.” Fielder and her sister had to walk with their young children the rest of the way to the Forrest Hotel where her husband worked. She recalled later, “that really hurt. That hurt my self-esteem. It embarrassed me. I don’t like circuses to this day.”⁸³ Such experiences reflected the absurdity of white supremacy and the frustrating anguish of black suffering.

⁸² First and fourth quotes, Neil R. McMillen, “How Mississippi’s Black Veterans Remember World War II,” in *Remaking Dixie*, 98-99, 107; second and third quotes, Ariel Barnes, interview by Sarah Rowe, April 1, 1993, MOHP Digital.

⁸³ Mable Fielder, interview, 5-6, 84.

Nevertheless, during and after the war, African Americans experienced their suffering in a new context—in a nation that used the war to bring its enlightened system of representative democracy to those regions of the world controlled by fascism, Nazism, and militarism. America engaged in that struggle while perpetuating its own racial absolutism. As the United States moved permanently into a globalized world, it could not long persist with its dual racial society and still boast of its enlightened political system. The dichotomy provided blacks with a means to articulate their demand for liberation in a lexicon understood by the world. Whites lived in the land of liberty. Blacks lived among them, but yet in a different plane of the *unfree*. The war transformed the nature of black resistance, moving it away from accommodation and toward protest. Laurel resident Gladys Austin recalled that before the war, most local blacks never questioned Jim Crow, but afterward she noticed a change in the black soldiers who returned to Laurel because “they had fought, they had been in other places and they just didn’t accept these conditions.”⁸⁴

For the vast majority of black residents and black veterans, the war represented a transitional phase providing them with a framework to develop an inchoate civil rights ideology, and to launch occasional, cautious acts of protest against Jim Crow. Still, persistent white oppression prevented the changes generated by World War II from flooding the Central Piney Woods with a torrent of enlightenment. Instead, they spilled into the land as a stream of promises. To a people so long suffering from an oppressive drought of liberty, local blacks tentatively approached the rivers of revolution. The progressive currents permeated, albeit slowly, the Central Piney Woods and encouraged a

⁸⁴ Gladys Austin, interview by Kim Adams, May 2, 1995, MOHP Digital.

spirit of resistance among a vanguard of local blacks. Over the next two decades, black leaders created tributaries of resistance to the racial order. Throughout the businesses and neighborhoods of Mobile and Front Streets, across the farms of the Kelly Settlement, and in the quarters of Palmers Crossing and South Laurel, the war awakened black hope.

On the other side of the railroad tracks, inside the mansions lining Fifth Avenue in Laurel and the Victorian homes in south Hattiesburg, across the farms in Cracker's Neck, and inside the company homes on Masonite Drive, the war provoked trepidation as it threatened to dismantle the fiercely protected white supremacist tyranny. Whites responded to federal intervention and the threat of black uprising by developing an embryonic massive resistance movement. White leaders in the Central Piney Woods encouraged the industrial growth ushered into its region by the war, but they stubbornly fought against the infiltration of progressive racial ideals that accompanied economic transformations. They used violence and Jim Crow laws to punish black defiance and succeeded in destroying several heresies against their white tyranny and forcing others deep underground. The white patriarchs stemmed the tide of liberation by staking full claim to all the wealth and opportunity the war produced. Consequently, on a local level, the Central Piney Woods and Mississippi at large achieved little tangible change during the war, even as some local black leaders capitalized on the war's challenge to racism and cautiously began to assault white supremacy. Thus, the Central Piney Woods experienced an ever shifting milieu of progression and regression as blacks engaged in heresies against the racial order, and whites condemned or eliminated them.

At the very least, on a national level, the war terminated southern isolationism, and the federal investigation and prosecution in the Wash case not only set the precedent

for federal intervention, but awakened the national and international consciences. By defending himself from an attack by his white boss, Howard Wash violated a sacred racial code in Mississippi, and he suffered the consequences of his heresy. Although an unwitting and forgotten rebel, his mob execution shaped him into a symbolic representation of the survival of white tyranny in a nation that prided itself as a beacon of liberty. The lynching, the investigation, and the federal trial set the complex forces of a local black vanguard, white supremacists, northern liberals, national civil rights organizations, federal judicial bodies, and white moderates into motion in the Central Piney Woods. Their actions laid the foundations for the powerful battles for equal justice that raged in Mississippi over the next several decades. The revolutionary struggle for black liberation evolved slowly, spending nearly two decades underground in the Central Piney Woods until national civil rights organizations and the nation built a strong enough foundation for local blacks to revolt and to survive. The Mississippi Leviathan emerged from the war licking its nonfatal wounds and prepared for a massive white crackdown that would stave off federal intervention and obliterate the nascent black freedom fight. White supremacists had learned that to maintain their control over their black populace, they must use their unjust legal system and political power on local, state, and federal levels, rather than the rope, as the tools to eradicate apostates of the racial order.

CHAPTER II:

INQUISITIONS: COLD WAR REVOLTS IN THE POLICE STATE

“There’s something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn’t be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it’s a white man’s word against a black man, the white man always wins.”¹ —Atticus Finch, in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*

On Friday morning November 2, 1945, policemen arrested black men across the Central Piney Woods after Willette Hawkins, a young, white homemaker in Laurel, reported that a “Negro” broke into her home on South Magnolia Street and raped her. By nightfall, police had a new suspect—Willie McGee, a 29-year-old delivery man for Laurel Wholesale Grocery and a father of four. On Saturday afternoon, McGee nearly escaped Mississippi, but Officers Hugh Herring and E. C. Harris spotted him a block from the Hattiesburg bus station. Officer Herring grabbed his arm, yanked him around, and shouted, “what’s your name?” McGee managed to say “Willie” before Herring slugged him in the face: “You done ravished a white woman at Laurel. You son of a bitch, we gonna break you Negroes up that gone in the army from coming back here and raping White women.” Blood gushed from McGee’s nose as the officers beat him and then threw him into the backseat of the police vehicle.²

In the Forrest County holding cell, officers took turns pummeling McGee with “slapjacks” until Laurel Chief of Police Wayne Valentine arrived with Officer Jeff

¹ Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (New York: Warner Books, 1960), 220.

² Quoting *State of Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1948), case no. 1268, transcript, Mississippi Supreme Court record, *Willie McGee v. Mississippi* (1948), case no. 36892, transcript, 715-716, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson; *Ibid.*, 720 [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript; and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, cited as MDAH]; “Forcible Entry, Criminal Assault, Reported,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 2, 1945; “Another Negro Jailed in Assault Investigation,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 5, 1945.

Montgomery and Highway Patrol Officer Jack Anderson to take possession of the prisoner. Valentine ordered McGee out of his cell and shouted into his face: “Get your clothes down, Nigger.” McGee, whose hands were cuffed in front of him, struggled to take down his pants. As he bent down, Valentine “popped [him] in the face.” After the officers examined his clothing, the beatings began again and continued as they tossed him in the back of the highway patrol vehicle and Officer Montgomery slid in beside him. While Anderson drove toward Laurel, Chief Valentine leaned over the front seat and demanded that McGee admit that he raped Hawkins. When McGee professed his innocence, Montgomery punched him in the mouth repeatedly. Finally, McGee ceased trying to speak.³

As they approached the city limits of Laurel, Chief Valentine warned McGee: “There’s two roads leading out of here, one leads to Jackson and one to Laurel, and the White people in Laurel would be mighty glad to get ahold of you You know what happened to that Negro Howard Wash in Laurel, the same thing will happen to you if you don’t tell what you did.” McGee, like everyone in Jones County, knew about the mob that dragged Wash from his cell and hanged him over Welborn Bridge. He also knew that if he tried to explain that Willette Hawkins was his lover not his victim, the chief would deliver him to the mob. Terrified, McGee told the officers what they wanted to hear. The chief took him to the Jones County jail anyhow. The sheriff and deputies forced him to undress, examined him, and then sent him to Jackson. Once ensconced in the Hinds County jail and safe from the threat of mob action, McGee tried to explain that he never raped Hawkins. The beatings began again. On Sunday, McGee turned 30-years-old. He

³ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 721, 728; *Ibid.*, 716-717, 720-731.

spent his birthday in terror as Jones County prosecutor Albert Easterling, Deputy Sheriff Preston Royals, Officers Herring and Montgomery, and two black trustees beat and threatened McGee. Still, he refused to confess. They returned to his cell every day that week to brutalize and torture him. Finally, he signed a confession that they authored.⁴ His possible innocence was immaterial to them. Because the crime they investigated was the rape of a white woman, they needed their beast.

The moment the lie left Willette Hawkins' lips, Willie McGee was damned. White southern men had built and sustained their white supremacist patriarchy by proselytizing a black beast mythology that ascribed to white women the role of a distorted Madonna responsible for preserving the purity of the white race; black men were the depraved fiends determined to defile them; and white men performed the role of the chivalrous white knights protecting the virtue of white women by controlling black depravity with violence. After the Wash lynching provoked federal intervention three years earlier, however, the patriarchs favored the gavel over the proverbial rope to dispose of heretics to the white supremacist order. The black beast dogma rendered McGee powerless and condemned in the courts of white men determined to sustain their hegemony over their patriarchal racial state. No Mississippi jury would publicly accept that a white woman voluntarily engaged in an affair with a black man. Moreover, the patriarchs would never allow that defense in the courtrooms, as it would undermine the sexual color line that undergirded the entire Jim Crow system. By early December 1945, McGee stood insane with terror before Judge Burkitt Collins in circuit court. The trial

⁴ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 716, *Ibid.*, 717-731, 706.

was a charade of justice—nothing short of an inquisition that ensured McGee’s conviction and execution.⁵

Before Mississippi authorities performed the execution, however, the leaders of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) appealed the verdict and launched a nearly six year crusade to prevent, as they perceived it, the “legal lynching” of another innocent black man. Hawkins never wavered from her claim that a black man broke into her home and raped her. Most of Mississippi’s white society believed her. Most blacks considered her a liar and McGee innocent. Throughout the McGee saga, both the CRC and the Mississippi patriarchs lied. Thus, most of the sources, though plentiful, are tainted. It is abundantly clear that Mississippi authorities denied McGee his right to a fair trial and that the testimony of prosecution witnesses was full of lies and inconsistencies, but that alone fails to prove McGee’s innocence. In the latter years of the case, the CRC leaders, in their effort to transform McGee into a more sympathetic victim, obfuscated significant facts in the case and blatantly lied about others, but the CRC distortions do not render McGee guilty. The narratives of McGee and Hawkins are slim, and they changed over the years, as they became strangled by the struggle for self preservation. Some of the earliest

⁵ *State of Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1945), case no. [?], transcript, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi, in author’s possession, 7-8; *Ibid.*, 2-6 [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript]; Dan Breland interview, June 30, 1952, Dixon Pyles interview, June 30, 1952, A. N., London interview, July 3, 1952, John Poole interview, July 2, 1952, all by Investigator [?] Spivack, Pt. I, Reel 11, 158-361, Civil Rights Congress Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as interviewee’s name, interview, CRC Papers]; The Willie McGee Case Fact Sheet, Pt. I, Reel, 11, CRC Papers; “Willie McGee Declared Sane,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 6, 1945; “Negro To Pay With Life Is Court Edict,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1945. For examples of the pervasiveness of the black beast mythology and lynchings, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Ida B. Wells, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors a Red Record Mob Rule New Orleans*. ed. William Loren Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

documents, including McGee's written statement to his defense lawyer, the original assessment of the case by a civil rights investigator, and the first trial transcripts offer important insights because the propaganda masters had yet to take control. In the end, the totality of the sources, combined with the historical context in which the case emerged, render McGee's original narrative most believable, and his execution appears to be a state sanctioned lynching of a black man guilty only of crossing the sexual color line.

Sexual relations between black men and white women enraged the white South like no other violation of the white patriarchy and set the stage for two other Mississippi inquisitions in the early Cold War era. Racist rhetoric dominated Mississippi elections, and none more than the 1946 senatorial campaign of radical white supremacist Theodore G. Bilbo. Obsessed with racial purity, Bilbo warned whites that unless they kept blacks from the polls, blacks would usurp power, make white women their wives, and birth a "mongrel race." Blacks responded to Bilbo's campaign by launching an inquisition of their own; they tried to unseat the senator by accusing him of violating their Fifteenth Amendment right to vote. Their bold action initiated a congressional investigation and furthered the development of black activism in the state. These and other threats to the racial order terrified Jones County whites to the point that between the trials of Willie McGee, and less than a year after the Bilbo investigations, authorities prosecuted Davis Knight for miscegenation, a felony in Mississippi. Although Knight appeared white, he was the descendant of a slave, Rachel, and her common-law white husband, Captain Newt Knight, who 84 years earlier had led a legendary rebellion against the Confederacy. Because these racial battles emerged in the aftermath of World War II and in the advent of the Cold War era, civil rights leaders evoked national and global empathy by

underscoring the dichotomy between America's rhetoric of freedom and its oppression of black citizens. In response, Mississippi patriarchs capitalized on the Red Scare to attack civil rights groups as communist enemies; their successful rhetorical campaign staved off federal intervention. Still, the McGee rape trials, the Bilbo investigation, and Knight's miscegenation case became pivotal racial struggles that exposed the myths, injustices, and violence used to sustain the color line and black disfranchisement—the core foundations of the white tyranny.⁶

Once McGee crossed that sexual color line into the forbidden landscape of the white world, he could not escape his white lover and the “trouble” she promised would find him if he defied her. Born on November 4, 1915 in Pachuta, Mississippi, McGee's family moved to Laurel when he was four. He dropped out of school after the seventh grade and spent his life toiling in hard labor and service jobs. He tried to join the army, but according to McGee, the military rejected him because of “something on the brain.” In 1935 he married 18-year-old Eliza Jane Payton, and within four years, they had four children Della, Gracie, Willie Earl, Jr., and Mary Lee. Known in the black community as “Black Dad” because of his “dark, smooth” skin and jocular charm, McGee always had a reckless soul. He adored his family, but he loved women, drink, and gambling, too. Stocky and handsome with intense, alluring eyes and an easy laugh, he could always find a party and become the center of it with his spirited humor, but he could rarely keep a job because he bucked discipline. Still, he possessed that magnetism that drew people and kept them near. Eliza grew incensed over his infidelity, but she stayed with him until

⁶ Quoting Bilbo to John E. Bryant, September 18, 1945, Theodore G. Bilbo Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Bilbo Papers].

Hawkins came along. According to McGee, Hawkins initiated the affair and then turned him into her possession. He later bemoaned, “after I got started with her I could not quit[,] but she put herself on me[.] I was not the one to ask her first.”⁷

Perhaps, McGee’s exuberance first attracted Hawkins. A coquettish and willowy brunette with beautiful almond-shaped eyes, Hawkins enjoyed liquor, men, and soirees, but she differed from McGee in many ways. Dark moods often engulfed her, and she suffered from chronic illnesses, night terrors, and restlessness. With the exception of a two-year stint in Indiana in the early 1940s, she spent her life in Laurel. In 1934, when she was just 20-years-old, she married a postal worker, Troy Hawkins, and over the next nine years, they had three daughters, Sandra, Mary, and Dorothy. They lived in a small three bedroom home on South Magnolia Street, a middle-class neighborhood sandwiched between the white and black sides of town. Because McGee mowed lawns and delivered laundry in that neighborhood, he frequently saw Hawkins on her porch. She always teased him, and after awhile she started calling him “her jitterbug.” He also worked for a while at McRae’s Service Station located a block from the Hawkins’ home and later at Bethea Grocery Store where Hawkins shopped. Once, after McGee helped Hawkins carry some of her purchases from the store, she tried to pay him, but he refused to accept a tip. She told him that she would “like to hug your neck,” a common expression among

⁷ First quote, Willie McGee Statement, in Dixon Pyles interview, 321, second quote, 318; fifth quote, 325; Ibid., 317-325, CRC Papers, [hereinafter cited as McGee Statement, CRC Papers]; third and fourth quotes, Bridgette Robinson-McGee, narration, unedited transcript, Willie McGee project, Radio Diaries, New York, New York, n. d., [hereinafter cited as Bridgette Robinson-McGee, narration, Radio Diaries]. In the first trial, George Walker testified that McGee was known as “black Dad,” see *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), 52. Marriage certificate for Willie McGee and Eliza Payton, April 20, 1935, *Jones County Marriage Record Colored*, vol. 9, 148, County Clerk’s Office, Jones County, Second District, Laurel, Mississippi.

southerners, but in those days the unwritten racial codes prohibited such familiar exchanges between black men and white women. McGee “smiled and walked away” as he understood the dangers of their attraction.⁸

One August day in 1944, as McGee delivered clothes on South Magnolia, Hawkins asked him to come inside her home because she had a job for him. When he entered her house, she sensed his fear. He was, after all, alone in a home with a white woman, a precarious situation in the Jim Crow South. She teased him that he “seem[ed] . . . afraid of white folk.” Refusing to be emasculated in front of her, he insisted that he was not. “You must be,” she teased, “you look like you are ready to run.” Then, as if to stop him, she took his arm and pulled him near. Either he forgot his place or railed against it. He slid his arms around her waist and kissed her. “Do you want to love me?” she asked. “My, oh yes,” he responded. She led him into the back bedroom where he made love to her. Their initial tryst led to a prolonged affair. Both of them took great risks with their forbidden romance as they not only cheated on their spouses but defied their ascribed roles in their Deep South town by assuming a sexual agency prohibited them. Later, McGee escorted Hawkins to a black nightclub where they danced together. Sometimes they made love at a black cemetery. More often, he slipped inside her home at

⁸ First and second quotes, McGee Statement, 319, second and third quotes, 318, CRC Papers; Dixon Pyles interview, 355, 359; A. N. London interview, 268, both in CRC Papers; Alex Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee: A Tragedy of Race, Sex, and Secrets in the Jim Crow South* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 46, 109, 111-112; Bridgette McGee-Robinson, interview and Ann Sanders interview, both by Samara Freemark and Radio Diaries staff, n. d., unedited transcripts, Willie McGee project, Radio Diaries [hereinafter cited as Bridgette McGee-Robinson interview, Radio Diaries; Ann Sanders interview, Radio Diaries].

night where they fornicated in the back bedroom, even as her husband slept in the front room.⁹

Hawkins may have chosen a black man as her lover because in a white patriarchy, she, rather than the man, would have control in the relationship. Still, Hawkins grew insecure about her status in McGee's life, and she ordered McGee to dump his other lovers, his "Negro whores" as she called them. He obeyed. McGee increasingly began to fear that if he rejected Hawkins' commands, he would invite the scorn of a white woman in a white supremacist world. Although McGee disliked her power over him, he continued to visit her. Perhaps, he was as addicted to her as she to him. He moved to Nevada for a short while, likely hoping that the distance and time would help them break their addiction. They did not. When McGee returned to Laurel, he visited Hawkins. She had shocking news. She was bearing his child, and he had to rescue them from their dangerous predicament. She had a plan. McGee would kill her husband so they could use his life insurance money to run away to California, elope, and raise their child. Hawkins' plot terrified McGee, and he tried to disentangle himself from her. He briefly left town again, and spent one of his short stints in California "to keep from killing her husband." But when he returned home, she pursued him. She visited him at his new job at Joe Newscom's Service Station to flirt with him. He quit. But then she tracked him down. She accused him of not loving her and warned, "I love you too much to let you do me anyway [so] you are going to do what I say or something is going to happen to you bad." Then she insisted that he "quit" his wife.¹⁰

⁹ Quoting McGee Statement, 319; *Ibid.*, 321, 323, 324, CRC Papers.

¹⁰ Quoting McGee Statement, 320-325, CRC Papers.

Eliza heard the rumors about her husband's philandering with a white woman, which she ignored until she found a photograph of Hawkins among McGee's belongings. Enraged, she ripped it up, and they fought. McGee tried to terminate his marriage to "please" Hawkins. Eliza and Willie had a raucous fight over his announcement, and in the aftermath, Eliza, at her father's insistence, took her children and moved in with her parents in Collins, a town 27 miles southwest of Laurel. After McGee separated from his wife, his life spiraled out of control. He lived in a two-room shack with his mother and jumped from job to job, but also willingly took money from Hawkins, some of which he likely gambled away. To make matters worse, Hawkins intensified her pressure on McGee to kill her husband, probably because soon it would become apparent that she was not pregnant. McGee tried "to do everything I could to get along with her and keep her from getting me deep in trouble. . . . She very much had me on the spot. I could not quit [her] because I was afraid she was going to tell on me." While he waited to determine if she was actually pregnant, he "sweet talk[ed] her and ke[pt] her fooled that I was going to bump him off." In late October, McGee began working as a delivery man for Laurel Wholesale Grocery, a job that paid \$25 a week, barely enough to support his family. By then, McGee wanted to reconcile with his wife, but Hawkins set a date for the murder—November 2.¹¹

McGee never intended to murder Troy Hawkins. He spent the early evening delivering cash-on-delivery groceries for customers of the Wholesale Grocery Store.

¹¹ Quoting, McGee Statement, 321-325, CRC Papers. Della McGee Johnson, interview by Bridgette McGee Robinson, n. d., unedited transcript, Willie McGee project, Radio Diaries [hereinafter cited as Della McGee Johnson interview, Radio Diaries]; Louis Burnham to George Marshall and Milton Kemnitz, December 26, 1945, Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers, [hereafter cited as Burnham letter, CRC Papers].

Afterward, he and his friend George Walker drove the company truck all over southern Mississippi to the homes of McGee's father-in-law, his brother-in-law, and friends in search of Eliza. When all efforts failed, McGee spent the night carousing with Walker and Bill Barnes from Queensburg to the KC Bottom. They gambled and drank heavily. In a skin game at Hettie Johnson's house, McGee lost all of his money, and then he gambled and lost the \$15.35 he had collected for Wholesale Grocery. Before dawn, McGee left his friends and headed for South Magnolia Street. Like he had on several occasions, he parked down the street and then snuck toward Hawkins' home. Troy Hawkins was sleeping in the back bedroom on this night because Willette was awake with their sick toddler in their bedroom. When McGee saw her through the window, he knocked on the pane. She let him inside through the front door.¹²

When Hawkins realized that McGee was drunk, had forgotten their plot, and had come for love making rather than murder, she dissolved into tears and threatened to commit suicide. He managed to calm her down. When she asked him if he "was . . . going to love her," he pulled her close and kissed her. She put her toddler in a crib and then turned back to McGee. She slid off his coveralls and led him to the bed. After they made love, he asked her for some money. Infuriated, she accused him of using her for her money to spend on his "Negro whores," but she went back into another room and returned with \$5.50. McGee never knew what happened inside the Hawkinses' house after he left. Perhaps, Troy awoke when McGee was leaving and saw a black man exit his home in which case, he either accused his wife of having an affair or assumed she was raped. Or maybe Hawkins realized that McGee would never kill her husband and

¹² *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 571-577; McGee Statement, 321, CRC Papers. Sometimes Hettie Johnson is referred to Hattie Johnson in court records.

determined to seek revenge as she had threatened. Something happened in that house that night because around 4:45 a.m., Hawkins ran naked, but for a halter top, screaming out of her home and across the street. Her husband chased her until she banged on the neighbors' window and begged them to let her inside. Troy did not pursue her further, and she spent the rest of the morning in the neighbor's guest bedroom alone. Hawkins later claimed that she ran from her home out of hysteria from the rape.¹³

According to Chief Valentine, he and police arrived at the Hawkins' home after 5:30 a.m. From their investigation, they deduced that the black rapist had broken in through the window. Although officers had no description of Hawkins' alleged attacker other than he had "kinky" hair as Hawkins claimed it was too dark to see him, they interrogated black men all over Jones County. McGee knew nothing of the investigation and was focused on pawning a zoot suit to replace the company collections he had lost. Apparently, McGee failed to acquire the needed funds before his boss reported the theft to police because McGee never showed up for work. By evening, police had taken several black men into custody on the rape charge, including Floyd Nix. Certain of Nix's guilt, police transferred him to the Jackson jail to protect him from a mob. Then on Saturday, Chief Valentine launched a massive search across Mississippi and Louisiana for McGee. As McGee had neither a criminal record nor a history in the county for trouble or violence, he would not have been among the usual suspects rounded up by police. The chief later claimed that while investigating McGee for company theft, he

¹³ Quoting McGee Statement, 320; *Ibid.*, 321-24, all in CRC Papers. For the Hawkinses actions on the morning of the alleged rape, see, A. N. London interview, 225-229, 235-239; Dan Breland interview, 185, CRC Papers. For neighbor's testimony regarding Hawkins fleeing to her home on the night of the alleged rape, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 536-538.

found evidence linking McGee to the rape. By that point, the newspapers reported that a white woman on South Magnolia had been raped by a black man. On Saturday afternoon, McGee, likely fearing Hawkins had turned on him, was desperately trying to escape Mississippi when police found him near the bus station in Hattiesburg.¹⁴

As soon as McGee became the main suspect, authorities determined to eliminate him. Yet to prevent intervention by the FBI, they kept him in protective custody in Jackson; to preclude reversals of the guaranteed guilty verdict, they staged a pretense of justice. They had reason to worry. During the 1930s, the famous interracial rape trials of the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama and the lesser known interracial murder trials of Arthur Ellington, Ed Brown, and Henry Shields in Kemper County, Mississippi had exposed the dual and unequal justice system in the Jim Crow South. The U. S. Supreme Court intervened and under the Fourteenth Amendment, the justices forced states to recognize the defendant's constitutional right to adequate defense counsel and a jury of their peers; they also ruled coerced confessions inadmissible. Despite such decisions, southern courts continued to violate these and other constitutional rights of black defendants. Laurel was no exception, though its leaders tried to do so secretly.¹⁵

¹⁴ Quoting Willie McGee Case Fact Sheet, Pt. I, Reel 11, CRC Papers; Ann Sanders interview, Radio Diaries; Donna Mills, interview by Bridgette McGee-Robinson, n. d., unedited transcript, Willie McGee Project, Radio Diaries, [hereinafter cited as Donna Mills, interview, Radio Diaries]; "Another Negro Jailed in Assault Investigation," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 5, 1945; "Forcible Entry, Criminal Assault Reported," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 2, 1945; *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 19-23, 34-36, 39, 41-42.

¹⁵ For the Scottsboro case, see *Powell vs. State of Alabama*, 287 U.S. 45 (1932) 287 U.S. 451, Supreme Court of the United States, Washington D. C.; Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979). For the Brown case, see *Brown et al. vs. Mississippi*, 297 U.S. 278 (1936), Supreme Court of the United States and Washington D. C.; Richard C. Cortner, A

Out of public purview, authorities deprived McGee of his constitutional rights to defend himself and to protect his person. They brutalized him until he signed their confession and a week before his trial, County Attorney Easterling, Horace McRae, and Troy Hawkins visited McGee and demanded that he confess to the rape in front of Hawkins, probably to further terrorize him into submission. It worked. Terrified, McGee admitted anything they asked. Authorities continued to keep McGee isolated in prison, denying him visitors until December 3 when the grand jury indicted him. Finally, when they allowed him one brief visit with his mother, Bessie, McGee told her that he never raped Hawkins. He had only confessed “to be living when you got here.” McGee stood at the apex of white rage, and the tortures he suffered, as well as his trepidation of impending death, consumed him. By the time authorities allowed him two meetings lasting a total of 90 minutes with his court-appointed white lawyers, H. E. Koch and M. W. Boyd, his mind broke; he lacked the ability to confer with them. Not that it mattered. Boyd and Koch never wanted the case, lacked litigation experience, and could not win it. Koch, from the Welch & Cooper firm, exerted no effort. Although Boyd, an owner of the Southern Hotel in Laurel, expended minimal energy on the case, he had rarely even practiced law. Both men knew that any attempt to exonerate McGee was futile and dangerous. They had a part to play: they would pretend to defend McGee to keep the federal government out of Mississippi.¹⁶

Scottsboro Case in Mississippi: The Supreme Court and Brown v. Mississippi (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005). For the impact of and lack thereof of these cases on the McGee case, see, Craig Zaim, “Trial by Ordeal: The Willie McGee Case,” *The Journal of Mississippi History*, 65 (Fall 2003): 215-247.

¹⁶ Quoting Burnham letter, CRC Papers; *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 715-731. Dan Breland interview, Dixon Pyles interview; A. N. London interview, John

Nearly a month earlier, on November 10, the *Laurel Leader-Call* reported that McGee had confessed to the rape, a story which would have tainted even a nonbiased jury pool. Of course, the prospect of finding unbiased jurors from an all-white jury pool in a white supremacist town would have proved an impossible task regardless. Most whites refused to consider that a white woman would willingly fornicate with a black man; so even if authorities allowed McGee to disclose the affair, no one would believe it. Local reporter Raymond Horne reflected the common local white perception of interracial affairs when he declared: “Personally, in my lifetime, I was never aware of a white woman that had a consensual relationship with a black man. I had never heard of it. I don’t find it plausible at all.” Jon Swartzfager, whose father later became the district attorney for Jones County and a significant figure in the McGee case, recalled that “McGee was going to be convicted. You had twelve white males on the jury who have to make a decision: Are we going to believe the white lady or are we going to believe the black man?” Local reporter Ann Sanders revealed the passions McGee inflamed when she noted: “it was just unheard of, a black man . . . came into a white woman’s house and raped her, it just incensed everyone.”¹⁷

A group of white men with radical racist mentalities often gathered at John’s Café in Laurel; they grew so enraged over the case that they determined to lynch McGee

Poole interview, 158-361; The Willie McGee Case Fact Sheet, Pt. I, Reel, 11; “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel, 35, all in CRC Papers. For local report on the trial see, “Willie McGee Declared Sane,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 6, 1945; Negro To Pay With Life Is Court Edict,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1945.

¹⁷ Quoting “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, prod. Joe Richman and Samara Freemark, Radio Diaries, May 7, 2010, [hereafter cited as “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair,” Radio Diaries].

before he ever entered the courtroom. Eighteen years later, these men, and Sam Bowers, who was often among them, formed the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan; Bowers became its Imperial Wizard and John's Café its main meeting center. In early December 1945, as the McGee trial approached, these radical whites spread the word that black men were not to come downtown. Black World War II veteran Norman Jones knew nothing of the McGee case or the warning when he arrived in downtown Laurel to surprise his mother and wife with his unexpected visit. Dressed in his military uniform and with his army bag slung over his shoulder, he proudly headed down Central Avenue toward the KC Bottom where his family lived. Blocks before he crossed the railroad tracks to the black side of town, he noticed white men flooding out of stores and staring at him. He looked around and realized that he was the only black person on the street. The white men started walking toward him. He knew that look in their eyes. He rushed as fast as he could toward the Bottom where blacks protected their own against whites. As soon as he crossed the tracks, the white men stopped and turned back. Even the very young sensed the danger. Jon Swartzfager recalled that Laurel "was like red hot centers, ready to explode." A lynching seemed imminent.¹⁸

Although the white patriarchs mostly possessed conservative racial mentalities, many of them had shifted toward more radical philosophies since World War II terminated southern isolationism and threatened their white tyranny. Like the radicals, they planned to ensure McGee's death; however, as practical conservatives, they knew a

¹⁸ Quoting Jon Swartzfager, interview by Bridgette McGee-Robinson, unedited transcript, n. d., Willie McGee Project, Radio Diaries, [hereinafter cited as Jon Swartzfager, interview, Radio Diaries]. Ann Landers interview, Radio Diaries; Jonathan Odell, "Norman Jones: Enemy Territory" *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author's possession.

lynching would invite federal intervention as it had in the Wash case. An execution was less likely to instigate federal wrath. Consequently, they ensured the implementation of significant security measures to prevent a mob murder. Heavily armed National Guardsmen transported McGee to and from Laurel, flanking him at all times, and they surrounded the courthouse. Deputies searched the hordes of spectators for firearms, and Judge Burkitt Collins warned them against violating the law no matter “how provoked we are.” Without the proper administration of justice by the courts, he declared, the system of law and democracy would disintegrate. Of course, Judge Collins had no interest in the sanctity of law in this case. Hawkins had once worked for him, and they had become close friends. Lynch mobs skulked inside the courtroom, and outside the courthouse a lynching was stymied only by the presence of National Guardsmen. Blacks flocked to the trial, but because of the dangerous environment, they refused requests by defense lawyers to testify in a change of venue hearing that McGee could never receive a fair trial because of the prejudicial milieu. Despite the mob presence, Judge Collins refused the change of venue request. McGee remained so terrorized throughout the one-day trial that a local reporter described him as “trembling, wild-eyed, unsteady on his feet and jibber[ing].” Still, when the defense requested a sanity hearing for McGee, Judge Collins corralled 12 white men from the courthouse, who, after listening to testimony from non-experts and deliberating for 15 minutes, determined McGee competent to stand trial.¹⁹

¹⁹ Quoting “Negro Indicted in Rape Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 3, 1945; second quote, “Willie McGee Declared Sane,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 6, 1945. Request for a change of venue included in Motion for Sanity Hearing, *Mississippi v. McGee* (December 6, 1945), McGee case file, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as McGee case file]; The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers; Burnham letter, CRC Papers; “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair,” Radio Diaries; “Negro Indicted in Rape Case,” *Laurel Leader-*

District Attorney Homer Pittman and County Attorney Easterling tried McGee that afternoon in a mob-filled courtroom. When Hawkins arrived at the courthouse unaccompanied by her husband, she played the role of the violated Madonna. On the night of the rape, Hawkins slept in the front bedroom with her toddler who had fallen ill; her other two daughters, ages eight and ten, slept in the adjacent room; and her husband slept in the back room. She had left the light on and the window open before she fell asleep, but when she awoke to the sounds of someone crawling near her bed, the room was pitch black. Thinking it was Troy, she reached out for him, but she felt “a bushy Negro head. Oh--” Hawkins cried out at the memory. When she regained her composure, she declared: “Well, this is an awful thing, it’s a terrible thing to happen to anyone—I said ‘What do you want? Why are you here?’” The intruder was on “his hands and knees,” and she smelled whiskey on his breath when he told her “Miss . . . I want your pussy and I am going to have it.” When she cried “No,” he ordered her to “shut your mouth, I will cut your throat.” She called for Troy, but quietly “because I didn’t want to wake the children.” When he told her he wanted to “fuck” her, she thought, “Well, if that’s all, I can take it.”²⁰

Pittman constantly prodded Hawkins, asking: “did he or did he not force you take your clothes off?” She responded, “yes, yes he did, he stood over, he said ‘unbutton them clothes, take them off, take them off, I will cut your throat.’” The intruder was furious

Call, December 3, 1945; “State Provides Heavy Guard for Negro,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 6, 1945; “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers.

²⁰ Quoting *Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1945), transcript, 7-8. *Ibid.*, 2-6. “Negro to Pay With Life Is Court Edict,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1945. For Troy Hawkins’ absence and assessment of trial, see Burnham letter, CRC Papers.

when he realized she had a sanitary pad on, but he ordered her to take it off and raped her. Pittman said, more than asked, “you were afraid of him, of course?” Hawkins declared: “I was afraid he was going to wake the children and I didn’t know but he would kill all of them, that is my idea, but I could never have gotten away from him.” She reached for the bedside lamp, and he told her that he had “cut the [electrical] wires” to the home. Though the darkness prevented her from seeing her attacker’s face, she described him as “that great big old negro.” McGee was five feet seven. Pittman asked her how “she got rid of him?” and she responded, “This may sound awful to you people for me to sit here and tell you this, but I want justice done, and I am going to tell you just what he did.” He asked her to kiss him, but she begged “no anything but that.” He demanded that she “promise . . . you will never tell it [or] . . . I will cut your head off.” When she promised to keep silent, he “jumped up and ran.” No one in the small house awakened during the rape, not even the child at her side.²¹

After the rapist left, Hawkins lay still for a few minutes before she “tipped” quietly through the house to check on the children and wake Troy because she feared that the rapist may have remained in the home. When she awakened Troy, she declared “the worst thing in the world that ever happened has happened to me.” She claimed that Troy immediately took her to the doctor. Contrarily, Troy Hawkins testified that much time passed before he took his wife to the doctor. After his wife awakened him, he lit a match and found his way to the kitchen where he inspected the fuse box and tried to find the problem for around “five or ten minutes.” Later, he discovered the wire connecting the electricity to the house was broken. Pittman insisted that that after Troy had made his

²¹ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript; 8-10. For McGee’s height and Hawkins’ height see, Heard, *The Eyes of Willie McGee*, 172, 112.

“preliminary investigation . . . you took your wife to a doctor, did you not?” Hawkins responded: “Well, it was a good while after that, that we called the doctor down there.” Afterward, he put his wife in a hospital in Hattiesburg for a week because “she is a nervous wreck.” The Hawkinses neglected to mention that Willette had run out of the house, and Troy chased her until she banged on a neighbor’s window; they would change their story in later trials.²²

Willette and Troy Hawkins’ testimony not only contradicted each others but it contradicted law enforcement witnesses and the alleged confession. According to the confession, McGee randomly drove to a white neighborhood, parked his vehicle on the street, and stumbled around peeping into houses. When he saw a light in a window and a lady lying on her bed, he entered the home through the front door. By that time, someone inside the home had turned out the lights. He found his way to the bedroom and raped the woman. Hawkins, however, had testified that she left her window open and the doors were locked. She claimed too, that the intruder cut off the electricity. Neither the confession nor officer testimony suggested the intruder picked the lock or damaged the electricity. Chief Valentine’s testimony contradicted parts of the confession and parts of the Hawkins’ account. When the chief arrived at the home less than an hour after the rape, “the lights were on,” and he found no evidence of a severed electrical wire. Hawkins had not fixed the electrical problem, so if someone had severed the wire, the lights would still be out. Like the Hawkinses, but in opposition to the confession, Chief Valentine suggested that the intruder had entered through the window as he found it

²² First and second quotes, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 10, all other quotes, *Ibid.*, 17-18. *Ibid.*, 2-11. For changing testimony in later trial, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 536-538.

“open, and there were signs as though someone had crawled up the outside of the window, there was dirt on the wall just below the window sill.”²³

Finally, the Hawkinses’ testimony provided a wealth of strange behaviors and inconsistencies for the defense to question, such as why Troy Hawkins spent time trying to fix the electricity rather than immediately calling the police, checking on his children, securing his house, and taking his wife for medical treatment. Willette Hawkins’ description of the attacker as “big” was inconsistent with McGee’s average stature. Hawkins was actually an inch taller than McGee. Hawkins’ testimony with axioms about the horror of rape seemed stereotypical commentary on rape rather than a victim’s narrative. Yet Boyd announced that he had no questions for the Hawkinses, and he neglected to ask Valentine about the inconsistencies between the confession and testimony. Boyd only alluded to the discrepancies during his cross-examination of Officer Montgomery who admitted that the confession made no mention of severing the electricity. Boyd even failed to object to the admission of the confession until the prosecutor—likely concerned about an appeal—asked the judge if he should qualify the statement. The judge sent the jury out and after quick assurances by Officer Montgomery that the confession was not gained through coercion, Judge Collins admitted it.²⁴

The defense also neglected to attack the prosecution’s physical evidence even though it was not only inconclusive and untested but some of the prosecution’s own witnesses discredited it. Dr. Grady Cook testified that after conducting a pelvic exam, he found live sperm inside of Hawkins and slight “abrasions,” but when asked to describe

²³ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 41. *Ibid.*, 6-9, 17, 66-67.

²⁴ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 8. *Ibid.*, 7, 8-11, 15-18, 41-42, 57-60, 66-68.

them as “bruises,” he insisted they were more like “scratches.” When asked if the exam showed that she had been raped, he responded that he had no idea what caused the “slight injury to the vagina” and neglected to state, as doctors often had and would in other rape cases, that the “injury” was consistent with a rape. Cook also made no mention that Hawkins was menstruating and in later trials would insist, contrary to Hawkins’ statement, that she was not menstruating when he examined her. Moreover, Pittman admitted into evidence McGee’s undershorts which had stains on the crotch that he alleged was Hawkins’ menstrual blood. Valentine testified that when he took the shorts from McGee after his arrest just a little over a month earlier, they were covered with bloodstains; now, the small remaining spot was fading. Koch and Boyd never even examined the shorts to note if a stain existed; nor did they question if the police had sent the shorts to a lab and tested the stain to determine if it was blood. If they had asked, they would have learned that the prosecution had not tested the alleged stain. The defense failed even to question why McGee, the supposed black rapist, would still be wearing shorts soiled with his white victim’s blood over 33 hours after the attack, especially in a town and a state with a history of lynching blacks accused of interracial rape.²⁵

Most of the state’s remaining witnesses provided inconclusive circumstantial evidence. Neighbors and a service station attendant placed the wholesale truck in the vicinity of the Hawkins’ residence at the time of the alleged rape. Boyd delivered his only decent cross-examinations when he asked these witnesses if they had seen the person in the vehicle. None had. Pittman tried to use McGee’s gambling buddies, Bill Barnes and

²⁵ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 13-14. *Ibid.*, 42-51. For revelations in later trials about problems with this evidence, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), 593, 596, 644-647, 761-763; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 100-101.

George Walker, to bolster his argument that McGee was drunk and blundered into the home to rape Hawkins. Barnes verified that he was intoxicated, but when asked, Walker responded: “Well, I couldn’t say . . . because he was always funny and joking anyway.” The police officers all testified that McGee smelled like alcohol, but that was not until Saturday afternoon, over 33 hours after he drank whiskey. Pittman also suggested that McGee was sleeping off his hangover when his co-worker Tal Porter found him asleep in the work truck in front of Laurel Wholesale Grocery around 6:00 a.m. Yet Porter testified that he did not smell liquor on McGee’s breath.²⁶

McGee’s own story that he was having an affair with Hawkins and that he visited her that night was more believable and consistent with the evidence. But McGee never took the stand nor did he once confer with his lawyers. He never uttered a word. He stared straight ahead like a “zombie” transfixed on nothing. He was petrified. His body shook and jerked involuntarily, and in the middle of the trial, he urinated on himself. No one took him to the bathroom to change. He sat in his urine-soaked pants with a puddle under the chair throughout the rest of the day. McGee had much to fear. Koch and Boyd neglected to call a single defense witness or present closing arguments. The all-white jury deliberated for exactly two and a half minutes, before declaring McGee guilty, and Judge Collins, without a moment of deliberation, immediately sentenced him to death. Within a single day, the court tried, convicted, and sentenced McGee to die in the electric chair. Collins scheduled the execution for midnight, January 7, 1946, less than a month later.²⁷

²⁶ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 55. *Ibid.*, 25-33, 52-56, 69-77.

²⁷ Quoting “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair,” Radio Diaries. *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945); “Negro To Pay With Life Is Court Edict,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1945; “McGee Convicted: Sentenced to Die,” *Hattiesburg American*,

To the chagrin of Jones County whites, a Jewish civil rights leader, George Marshall, intervened in the case. In April 1946, Marshall co-founded and became chairman of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), a communist organization committed to civil liberties, civil rights, and organizing labor, and he established its headquarters in New York. Marshall made the McGee case one of its central causes. After the trial, Marshall sent a black activist from Alabama, Louis M. Burnham, to investigate the case, but the sheriff denied Burnham access to McGee. Burnham found the environment hostile, the testimony suspect, and the treatment of the McGees horrible. After the trial, Bessie McGee found her son in shambles. During the few brief visits allowed, McGee sat on his cot wringing his hands and appeared unaware of her presence. Desperate to save her son, McGee gave her life savings of \$205 to retain Earl Wingo, the President of the Mississippi Bar Association and a Hattiesburg attorney who had defended the lynchers of Howard Wash. Yet after accepting the retainer fee, Wingo left for a vacation and would not return to the Central Piney Woods until after the execution date. Because Burnham and Marshall doubted McGee's guilt, they procured the services of a prominent Mississippi lawyer from the capital city, Forrest B. Jackson, to appeal the verdict. Burnham considered Jackson "unusually fair-minded," as Jackson had previously worked on two NAACP cases and even used his own money to pay court costs on one case. He

December 7, 1945; *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), case no.1173, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 11, 511, 516, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), minute book]; Burnham letter, CRC Papers. For McGee's rendition of events, see McGee Statement, 325, CRC Papers.

agreed to accept any fee Marshall could arrange. McGee trusted Jackson, and he gave him a written statement detailing his affair with Willette Hawkins.²⁸

Jackson fulfilled his reputation as one of Mississippi's best lawyers when on January 2, 1946—five days before the scheduled execution—he convinced the Mississippi Supreme Court to grant McGee a stay. Six months later, he persuaded the justices to reverse the conviction and remand the case to the circuit court on the grounds that Judge Collins erred when he refused to change the venue despite the prejudicial milieu in Laurel. The justices also denied a motion by prosecutor Easterling, who requested that the state return McGee to the Jones County jail on the grounds that his incarceration in Jackson rendered his case more difficult to prosecute. Considering that during the first trial, the courthouse crawled with whites ready to lynch McGee, the proposition proved ludicrous. Throughout the Jim Crow era, the higher court justices adhered to the law more consistently than their circuit court counterparts, as they enjoyed

²⁸ Quoting Louis Burham letter, CRC Papers. On McGee's view of Jackson and McGee giving his statement to Jackson, see Dixon Pyles, interview, 311, CRC Papers. For CRC's initial involvement, see, Fact Sheet – Willie McGee Action Bulletin, May 22, 1950, Pt. I, Reel, 10, CRC Papers. For information on Forrest Jackson, see Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 55-56. When Marshall assumed the case, he was chairman of the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties (NFCL). It became a CRC case after the NFCL and the International Labor Defense (ILD) merged in April 1946, see Charles H. Martin, "Introduction," *Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Papers of the Civil Rights Congress*, ed. August Meir and John H. Bracey, Jr. (Bethesda, Maryland: University of America, 1988), v-x, CRC Papers. For Marshall's background, see "George Marshall, 96, Pioneer in the Civil Rights Movement," *New York Times*, June 18, 2000 and George Marshall, George Marshall Obituary, *Columbia College Today*, vol. 27, no. 4 (May 2001), http://www.college.columbia.edu/cctarchive/may01/may01_obituaries.html (accessed September 2009).

autonomy from local influences. Even in racially charged cases the justices intermittently reversed irresponsible rulings by lower courts.²⁹

The reversal enraged local whites, and some of them projected their fury on McGee's family. They threatened McGee's estranged wife, Eliza, and their children who lived in nearby Collins. Soon after the reversal, two white men in a truck tried to run over McGee's nine-year-old daughter, Della, as she was walking home from school. As white rage grew in the wake of the CRC involvement, Eliza decided to relocate to Las Vegas where her sisters lived. Before she left, she took her four children to the jail to say goodbye to their father. Della saw in her daddy's face that they should not have come. The jailors treated the family with disdain and harassed McGee's seven-year-old son. The children tried not to feel anything as they said goodbye and fled Mississippi. McGee never saw them again. For the rest of Eliza's life, she and her children never discussed with each other "what happened back in Mississippi." It pained them too much. Della had often seen her mother crying over her father's cheating, and she knew her parents separated over the white woman. Still, she loved her father and believed him innocent. Through relatives in Mississippi, Della kept informed of the trials. For the most part,

²⁹ Petition for Appeal, *Mississippi v. McGee* (January 2, 1946), Order on Appeal, *Mississippi v. McGee* (January 3, 1946); Motion to Remove Defendant, *Mississippi v. McGee* (June 10, 1946), all in McGee Trial Papers. *Willie McGee v. Mississippi*, 36166 Miss., 26 So. 2d, 680-684 (June 10, 1946). For analysis of the Mississippi Supreme Court, see Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 218.

however, after the children left Mississippi, they tried to forget their father because no matter the appeals, Mississippi, they knew, would eventually execute their father.³⁰

The citizens of Laurel knew that, too. Despite the reversal by the state supreme court, most local blacks and whites assumed that the next inquisition would replicate the first. However, killing McGee would prove more difficult than authorities first imagined. After the successful appeal, Jackson turned over the case to two other lawyers from the capital city—Dixon Pyles and Dan E. Breland. McGee reacted with great trepidation once Pyles and Breland assumed the case, perhaps because both men referred to him as “nigger” and confused his terror with idiocy. McGee feared Pyles and distrusted both men to the point that he barely conversed with them. A 33-year-old stocky veteran of World War II, Pyles had a fierce personality. On his own since he was 16-years-old, he fought in five European campaigns as a gunner and chose as his friend and mentor a rabid racist, Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, yet he also had an affinity for the exploited and made his name as a union lawyer. As lead counsel, Pyles developed a three-pronged approach to defend McGee: prove McGee legally insane; develop proof of judicial errors to force higher courts to overturn the certain guilty verdict; and prove that no rape occurred on the grounds of a Mississippi statute which classified sexual attacks as rape only if the victim fought with all her might against the perpetrator.³¹

³⁰ Quoting “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair,” Radio Diaries. Bridgette McGee-Robinson, narration, Bridgett McGee-Robinson interview, and Della McGee Johnson interview, Radio Diaries.

³¹ For example of racial slurs, see, Dan Breland, interview, 180, 184, 193 and Dixon Pyles, interview, 310-311, CRC Papers. For the case strategy, see, Dixon Pyles interview, 158-159, 162-167, 173-185, 202, CRC Papers; *State of Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1946), case no. 3237, transcript, Mississippi Supreme Court record, *Willie McGee v. Mississippi* (1947), case no. 36411, transcript, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as

During preliminary hearings in September 1946, Pyles and Breland moved to quash the indictment on the grounds of jury discrimination. The clerk drew names of potential jurors from the voting rolls. Since registrar Lonnie Meader had only registered 90 blacks compared to 12,000 whites, blacks were not only unlikely to be chosen but had never served on a grand or petit jury. Pyles and Breland also demanded a change of venue. Although every member of the black community they interviewed declared that McGee could never receive a fair trial in Jones County, only one black man, Reverend T. W. Patterson, agreed to testify. On the stand, Patterson suddenly fell silent, for he feared the mob that packed inside the courtroom. Judge Collins promised Patterson, “you won’t be bothered as long as you are in court.” Patterson replied, “Judge, I won’t be in this court very long.” The spectators erupted in laughter, and Pyles noted that the response reflected the prejudicial atmosphere. Finally, Patterson stated that McGee would never receive a fair trial in Laurel. Pyles also revealed that whites warned the defense team that McGee would die before he reached the courthouse; he brought Sheriff Hill to the stand to testify that his deputies lacked the ability to protect McGee from a mob; and he cited the presence of the National Guard as proof that the state authorities feared a lynching. Still, Judge Collins denied all defense motions, but he had to recuse himself from the case when his wife fell ill. When the future Mississippi senator, Judge John C. Stennis, took over the bench, he ordered Sheriff Hill to discharge the National Guard in favor of local deputies. Hill refused to comply unless Stennis accepted full responsibility for McGee’s

Mississippi v. McGee (1946), transcript]; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 81-82, 92-94.

safety. Instead, Stennis moved the trial to Hattiesburg in adjacent Forrest County. When jury selection commenced in Hattiesburg, Judge Collins resumed the case.³²

Because Hattiesburg was also a bastion of white supremacy, hundreds of National Guardsmen, armed with machine guns and bayonets, protected McGee from the constant lynch mobs lurking around the courthouse. Despite the danger, during voir dire, Pyles and Breland asked prospective jurors if McGee and Hawkins engaged in “sexual intercourse . . . would the fact that there is a White woman involved in this matter so prejudice you against the defendant that you would be unable” to find the defendant not guilty? And if the evidence proved McGee’s innocence, would they have the “moral courage” to exonerate him, even though the defendant was a “Negro” and the alleged victim “white,” and even if they might face ostracism from their community? Although when the trial began on November 11, National Guardsmen supposedly searched everyone who entered the courthouse, Troy Hawkins approached Breland and Pyles in the courtroom and showed them the pistol he kept in his pocket. He warned them that if they further suggested his wife cuckolded him with a black man, he would kill them. In the Deep South town, the mere suggestion of such an affair surely humiliated him and soiled his family name. So consistently did Hawkins try “to get Willie killed,” the Sheriff kept him in jail for the remainder of the trial.³³

³² Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1946), transcript, 169, 171; *Ibid.*, 104, 140-400; Motions and Rulings, *Mississippi v. McGee* (September 27, 1946), case no. 1173, McGee Trial Papers; “Negro Willie Magee is Denied Change of Venue,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1946; “Willie Magee Trial Goes to Hat’burg,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1946; “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers.

³³ First quote, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1946), transcript, 129, second quote, *Ibid.*, 130, third and fourth quotes, *Ibid.*, 124; *Ibid.*, 125-137; fifth quote, Dan Breland

Although Pittman presented essentially the same case he had in the first trial, he had better prepared his witnesses to provide stronger testimony, but he also faced a much greater adversary in the defense team. Pyles easily discredited the sole physical evidence in the case—McGee’s supposedly bloody undershorts. When prosecutors presented the shorts this time, the stain had disappeared. Pyles asked Chief Valentine if a bloodstain would fade in “ten or eleven months?” Valentine was unsure. He was certain that he had never determined the stain was blood. Pyles also attacked the prosecution’s strongest evidence—McGee’s alleged confession. He tried to prevent its admission by pointing out that McGee had no attorney present during interrogations and that heavily armed police officers extracted the confession from him through intimidation. Judge Collins disagreed. Pyles also attacked the circumstantial evidence by pointing out that not a single witness saw McGee at, or near, Hawkins’ home on the night of the alleged rape.³⁴

Pyles centered his case on proving that because Hawkins failed to fight her attacker, the sex was not rape under the Mississippi statute. However, unlike in the first trial, Hawkins proclaimed that she vigorously resisted: “All the time I was trying to protect the baby with one hand and shove him away with the other.” For three hours, Pyles aggressively challenged Hawkins’ claims; he stressed that in the first trial she claimed that she submitted to the rape without a fight, even responding to the black intruder’s proposal for sex, “well if that’s all, I can take it?” Distraught, Hawkins called Pyles a liar. Pyles slightly erred because Hawkins had testified that she thought the phrase, but she never uttered such words aloud. During the cross-examination, Hawkins

interview, 185. Ibid., 180,184-186, Dixon Pyles interview, 348-349; A. N. London interview, 225-229, all in CRC Papers.

³⁴ Quoting Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 100-101.

became hysterical and Judge Collins called for a recess. Pyles had actually treaded fairly cautiously. A local lawyer, Paul Swartzfager, had told Breland that Hawkins had a “loose” reputation, drank too much, and even tried to seduce him and another man at a party. Pyles never questioned her about these rumors. Neither did he ask Hawkins about her affair with McGee, even though he had obtained McGee’s written statement attesting to the romance.³⁵

Pyles and Breland called McGee to the stand, but they never planned to ask him about the affair. Although they had little time to seek witnesses or evidence to verify McGee’s story and their short investigation failed to uncover anything, they neglected even to find out if Troy had a life insurance policy that Willette could collect. Even if they had found witnesses or evidence, they never would have presented it, because, as Pyles noted, if they dared to allow a black man to claim a white woman as his mistress “there would have been a riot in the courtroom . . . we wouldn’t have lived to have gotten out of town.” Breland later recalled, “We didn’t know what we were getting into ourselves or we never would have got into it. . . . Oh, money couldn’t have hired me.” They had called McGee to testify because they hoped that the jury might consider him insane and send him to prison rather than the chair. They set the stage for his appearance with testimony by a psychiatrist who labeled McGee on “the borderline between the imbecile and moron classes” with a mentality of “a seven and a half year old;” and his

³⁵ First and second quotes, Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 100; *Ibid.*, 98-99; third quote Dixon Pyles interview, 358, CRC Papers. For more on Hawkins reputation, see, Dixon Pyles interview, 355-357, CRC Papers. For Dan Breland’s view on Hawkins’ testimony in first and second trial, see, Dan Breland interview, 193-195, CRC Papers. McGee Statement, 311, 315-325, CRC Papers. For the correct record of Hawkins’ testimony in the first trial, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 7. For Hawkins’ demeanor in second trial, see, “Willie Magee’s Victim on Witness Stand,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 12, 1946.

mother who claimed the military discharged McGee “because of a sickness in the head.” When they called McGee, he froze in terror and refused to move from the defense table. The sheriff had to carry him to the stand and sit him on the chair. McGee sank down, trembled constantly, and never uttered a word. After the three-day trial concluded on November 14, 1946, the all-white male jury deliberated for 11 minutes before returning a guilty verdict. Judge Collins sentenced McGee to death. The defense, at the least, managed to suggest during voir dire questioning that Hawkins and McGee had been lovers. Still, as many whites in Laurel knew, even if the defense could prove the affair, no white juror would acquit him, not if they wanted to remain alive in Laurel.³⁶

Even if whites believed an affair existed, to expose Hawkins and exonerate McGee would have admitted that white women could be attracted to black men, which would undermine the black beast mythology that buttressed the white patriarchal state. During the McGee case, racial murders to control the sexual color line also persisted in Laurel. McGee’s attorney in his second trial, Dixon Pyles, knew about the “tall, strapping looking nigger” bellboy, who was caught making love to his white girlfriend in a hotel room in Laurel. The police found them in bed and arrested them. As Pyles recalled: “they knew that the nigger wasn’t guilty of nothing except wanting a piece,” and the woman admitted loving and desiring the man because “he was the only man she ever knew who

³⁶ First quote, Dixon Pyles interview, 349, *Ibid.*, 348, 311-314; second quote, Dan Breland interview, 182; *Ibid.*, 167, 172-201, all in CRC Papers. All other quotes, “Willie M’Gee in Hub Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 13, 1946. “Circuit Court,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 14, 1946; “Willie M’Gee Again is Sentenced,” *The Laurel Leader Call*, November 14, 1946; Jon Swartzfager interview, Radio Diaries.

could satisfy her.” The enraged officers would not listen to such talk so “they killed that nigger . . . they didn’t lynch him there. The sheriff down there just shot him.”³⁷

White patriarchs had no intention of surrendering their privileged status in Jim Crow society. They were always more interested in power than racial purity. As much as the black beast mythology sanctified white female virtue, it condemned black females as Jezebels luring all men to their beds, which not only allowed white men to take black mistresses but to rape black women with near impunity and ignore their mixed-race offspring. Whites used their power over the judicial system to allow the rape of black women, for rarely would a white jury indict a white man accused of interracial rape. Since Reconstruction, the rope, the gavel, and the badge granted white men an unfettered license to control the bodies of women—black and white—and of black men, all in the interest of sustaining white patriarchy. During McGee’s trials, the CRC, the NAACP, and the communist newspaper *The Daily Worker* publicized the dehumanization and victimization of black southern women after an Alabama jury refused to indict the gang of white men who raped Recy Taylor. In Mississippi, convictions of white men for the rape of black females were so rare that when Forrest County produced a conviction nearly two decades later, the newspapers heralded it as a first in the state. Actually, Mississippi had a smattering of these rare convictions over the years, including one in Laurel.³⁸

³⁷ Dixon Pyles, interview, 360, CRC Papers.

³⁸ Danielle McGuire, “‘It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped,’ Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History*, 1 (December 2004): 906-931.

Not long after McGee's second conviction, on December 6, 1946, a white man abducted a five-year-old black girl and whisked her into the woods where he raped her. When a doctor examined her, he found her "bleeding profusely from lacerations that indicated rape." Police, acting on a tip from witnesses who had seen 24-year-old Laverne Yarbrough with blood stains on his clothes, body, and, face, tracked the rapist to a restaurant and rushed him into custody. It is possible that like McGee, Yarbrough was railroaded. Undoubtedly, a white man raped the little girl, but the state neglected to test the physical evidence or tie Yarbrough to the crime. When attorney Jack Deavours defended Yarbrough at his trial the following March, he pointed out the sloppiness of the state's case. Investigators never put Yarbrough in a line-up but told the witnesses that they were bringing them in to identify the man whom they had seen with the little girl that day. They filed past Yarbrough who sat alone in a room. During the trial, prosecutors coached the victim to identify Yarbrough as her attacker by constantly pointing toward the defense table while they questioned her on the stand about the "bad man." The prosecution had never tested the bloodstains found on Yarbrough. Yet, the jury took two hours to find him guilty and sentenced him to life in prison.³⁹

The conviction, if indeed Yarbrough was guilty, was really not a watershed, because Mississippi whites tended to oppose pedophilia, no matter the race of the victim. Seventeen years earlier in Yazoo City, a white jury had also convicted and sentenced a white man for the rape of a black child—in this case a seven-year-old. As Neil McMillen

³⁹ "White Youth on Rape Trial Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 10, 1947; "Trial Rape Ends Late Tuesday," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 11, 1947. "Life in State Prison Set for Yarbrough," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 12, 1947. See too, Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 135-139.

in *Dark Journey* notes, the age of the victims in the Yazoo case proved as vital to the conviction as the prosecution's evidence. The same was likely true in the Laurel case. McMillen also points out that had the perpetrator been black and the victim white, the jury would have sentenced him to death. Whites were still loath to sentence white perpetrators who attacked blacks to death, no matter the depravity of the assault. By 1965, white juries in Mississippi had convicted 12 white men of raping black women, and three such men suffered life sentences. None had been sent to the electric chair, unlike their numerous black counterparts accused of raping white females. Finally, even though the victim in the Yarbrough case was a child, the white patriarchs and citizenry failed to react with the same rage and gathering of lynch mobs that they had displayed in the McGee case.⁴⁰

Though the judicial system offered some protection to black children, in general, white men could still sexually harass black children, and they could rape black teenagers and women with impunity. The parents of Lula Cooley, a black resident raised in Laurel, forbade her to walk alone anywhere, and she could only walk to town without her parents if she was with a large group and then "only in the day, nothing in the evenings, and certainly not at night." Despite the precautions, when Cooley and her friends passed the building near the train tracks that separated black and white communities, white men exposed themselves to the girls. The girls ran, and thereafter they took the long way

⁴⁰ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 205-206; Observations from Percy Green, n. d., Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission File, Governor Paul Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, Ser. II, Subser. 9, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]; The Fellowship of the Concerned, Southern Regional Council, "Dual Justice in the Courts—Unconcerned Community," 2-5, 8-11, A. E. Cox Collection, Addendum, 1978, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Mitchell, MSU].

home to avoid the white men. White authorities never punished these deviants. Most white Mississippians considered black females who had passed puberty “unchaste.” Around a decade after the Yarbrough case, a group of white men gang-raped a black teenage girl in Laurel and made her boyfriend watch. No one investigated the crime. The girl left town, and no one, not even her boyfriend, ever heard from her again.⁴¹

African Americans understood that such racial injustices would persist as long as white supremacists controlled the political and legal establishment. Without suffrage, they could not elect sheriffs, district attorneys, and judges nor could they sit on juries. In 1946, while McGee suffered through an appeal of the first verdict, a second trial, and another appeal, Mississippi blacks launched an inquisition of their own: they tried to unseat Senator Theodore G. Bilbo on charges that he had denied them their Fifteenth Amendment right to vote. Two years earlier, in 1944, secretary of the NAACP branch in Jackson, T. B. Wilson, co-founded the Mississippi Progressive Voters League in hopes of politicizing the state’s black population. The league offered voter-education classes and encouraged local blacks to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Soon after the league’s formation, the NAACP won a victory for black suffrage when the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Alwright* that the white-only Democratic primary system was

⁴¹ First quote, McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 205-206; all other quotes, Lula Cooley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2010, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, Center for Oral History and Cultural Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter recordings in this collection cited as MOHP recording, interviews in the digital collection cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts in this collection cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]; Jonathan Odell, “Mrs. Elnor Andrews: Viewing the Body of Willie McGee,” *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author’s possession.

unconstitutional. In the spring of 1946, Bilbo spied on the league and learned that its leaders hoped to raise \$20,000 to launch voter discrimination suits in federal courts against any Mississippi official who denied qualified black voters the right to register.⁴²

To mobilize the white citizenry to destroy the league and stymie the black vote, Bilbo appealed to the basest fears of white Mississippians—miscegenation, black rule, the Red menace, and Yankee tyranny. During his 1946 reelection campaign, Bilbo claimed that black veterans, exempted from the poll tax because of their service, had registered to vote in preparation for the grand black coup. He claimed that communists in the North had also mobilized the wider black citizenry to vote in the Mississippi Democratic primary that July. If whites allowed a few blacks to register, Bilbo warned, they would encourage a trend resulting in massive black voting—a dangerous prospect in Mississippi, where blacks comprised nearly half of the population. To prevent such a catastrophe, Bilbo sent letters to all of his primary opponents—and a copy to newspapers across the state—demanding that they join his crusade to quash the black assault on Mississippi’s white supremacist order. In the letter, he cautioned that the public would perceive acts of evasion as an endorsement of black suffrage. Bilbo also took his fight to the white citizenry. He implored whites to pay their poll taxes and vote to dilute any increase in black ballots. Bilbo had many supporters like D. P. Cameron, the president of

⁴² *Constitution of the Mississippi Progressive Voters League*, Bilbo Papers; Steven F. Lawson, *Running For Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991), 17, 24; *Civil Rights Litigation: Cases and Perspectives*, ed. Roy L. Brooks, Gilbert Paul Carrasco, Gordon a. Martin, Jr. (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1995), 516-519; United States Senate, Seventy-Ninth Congress, *Hearings Before the Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 1946*, December 2-5, 1946, Senate Library, vol. 808, microfiche, card 13, 27 [hereafter cited as *Bilbo Hearing*]; Report of the Session of the Mississippi Progressive Voters League, Jackson, Mississippi, May 18, 1946, Bilbo Papers.

the Merchants Company in Hattiesburg, who sent his branch managers across the state letters stressing the importance of the 1946 election and requesting that they inform their employees that “as white citizens of Mississippi they owe it to Mississippi to pay their poll taxes and be prepared to vote.” Cameron also urged salesmen to spread the word among their clients. The radio station owned by Forrest Broadcasting in Hattiesburg publicized a similar message.⁴³

In campaign speeches across Mississippi, Bilbo incited white rage by declaring that race purity lay in grave danger because black men desired “social equality, intermarriage and interbreeding.” Bilbo liked to say: “I don’t mind having the nigger for my brother in Christ, but I’m damned if I want him for a son-in-law.” Bilbo argued that any sort of racial mixing would pollute and degenerate the white race. Although white society had evolved over a 4,000 year period and had developed a sophisticated and intelligent culture, “the nigger . . . the poor devil is only a hundred and fifty years removed from the jungle and eating his own kind.” Bilbo insisted that white supremacy proved natural in such a framework, and he declared proudly, “I believe in white superiority, white domination and the integrity of white blood.” He warned that Yankee communists, however, hoped to destroy white supremacy. They held secret meetings with Mississippi blacks at which they taught them how to register and vote. These communists understood that black suffrage would force white politicians to cater to black demands in

⁴³ Quoting D. P. Cameron to branch managers, n. d. Cameron to Bilbo, January 22, 1945; Bilbo to C. J. Wright, February 8, 1945; The Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 1946, *Senate Minority View Report*, n. d., 3-4, all in Bilbo Papers.

order to win elections, a first step in a grand strategy to undo the race-based social order.⁴⁴

Bilbo ranted, but he also called whites to action. He argued that Mississippians were “sleeping on a volcano,” and white men must employ “any means at their command” to prevent its eruption. The state’s circuit clerks must design registration exam questions that would disqualify “undesirables,” and white citizens must suppress black assertiveness. Bilbo proclaimed, “Mississippi is white. We got the right to keep it that way.” He roused men to action when he declared, “I am calling on every redblooded American who believes in the superiority and integrity of the white race to get out and see that no nigger votes.” He suggested that the leader of the Mississippi Progressive Voter’s League “should be atomically bombed and exterminated from the face of the earth.” Bilbo assured that white men need not worry about repercussions, because all-white male juries would never indict or convict a registrar for “refusing to register a nigger.” On a Saturday night at the end of June 1946, Bilbo addressed a crowd in Laurel that overflowed from inside the courthouse onto the streets. Newly-elected District Attorney Paul Swartzfager, who as county attorney in 1942 had prosecuted Howard Wash, introduced Bilbo as “the bulwark of Mississippi [who] has the patience of Job in fighting for white supremacy and against the Communists and . . . the FEPC and other bills that would injure the South.” He proudly stated that “they say only the common man votes for Bilbo, well I am glad I am common.” When Bilbo took the podium, he launched

⁴⁴ First quote, Hodding Carter, “‘The Man’ From Mississippi—Bilbo,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 30, 1946, 12; all other quotes, National Committee to Oust Bilbo, Petition for Redress of Grievances regarding Senator Theodore G. Bilbo to the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and Committee on Campaign Expenditures, September 1946, exhibit, 1, 4, Bilbo Papers; [hereafter cited as Bilbo Petition, Bilbo Papers], *Ibid.*, 1-5.

into a diatribe against blacks, repeatedly warning whites that if blacks voted in the upcoming primary, it would prove the “gravest day in 70 years of Mississippi history.” A few days later, Bilbo delivered another inflammatory speech in Laurel. He admonished the crowd to “remember the best way to keep the negro from voting is to see him the night before.”⁴⁵

Whites responded with enthusiasm to Bilbo’s call to arms. Many blacks, who dared to travel to the courthouse and attempt to register, faced beatings by mobs, and they confronted hostile registrars who turned them away or administered voting tests to disqualify them. One black man managed to vote in Laurel, but the registrar turned away four other African Americans. In Hattiesburg, when one black man, Reverend J. H. Ratcliff of the Truelight Baptist Church, voted, the local newspaper printed his name on the front page. Of Mississippi’s 350,000 black voting-age citizens, a mere 5,000 registered; only about half of them managed to vote. In a landslide, Bilbo won the election with 97,820 votes. Tom Q. Ellis came in second with 58,005 votes and the other three candidates each failed to receive more than 19,000 votes. Whites in Jones County, and to a slightly lesser degree in Forrest, voted in large numbers for Bilbo.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ First and second quotes, Bilbo Petition, 1, Bilbo Papers; third quote, *Ibid.*, 2, fourth quote, *Ibid.*, 4, fifth quote, *Ibid.*, 3; sixth quote, Hodding Carter, “‘The Man’ From Mississippi—Bilbo,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 30, 1946, 12; seventh, eighth, ninth quotes, “Senator Bilbo Addresses Big Crowd At Courthouse Here,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 24, 1946; tenth quote, “Mississippi is [?] First Major Contest at Polls Since U. S. Supreme Court Rule on Negro Vote,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 28, 1946.

⁴⁶ Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 80th Congress, 1st Session, *Investigation of Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 1946*, S. Res. 224 (Washington: GPO 1947), Reports nos. 1 and 2, [hereinafter cited as *Bilbo Investigation Report*]; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 3; “Few Mississippi Negroes Vote Unmolested in Democratic Primary,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1946; “Laurel

Despite Bilbo's victory, the editors of *The Laurel Leader-Call* criticized whites for failing to vote on a massive scale in the wake of the black threat. They pointed out that only 200,000 of the eligible citizens of the state voted—a paltry number in a state of nearly two million people. Whites, they complained, showed similar apathy toward education when they allowed their children to drop out of school at a young age. While many whites failed to take advantage of the privileges of education and the vote, blacks sacrificed everything to keep their children enrolled in school, and they desperately desired to participate in the political process. If white apathy persisted, while black enthusiasm increased, the editors warned, Mississippi's social and political landscape would steadily change over the next several decades until black hands assumed the reigns of the state. In 1946, however, Mississippi remained firmly under the control of white supremacy, and the election clearly showed that whites would fight to preserve their racial caste system by voting for one of the most radical white racists in the state. Their beloved Bilbo called his triumph the “greatest victory of our lives because we have defeated our enemies outside of Mississippi . . . [W]e did something that our fathers could not do—we whipped the damnyankees.”⁴⁷

Infuriated, the Mississippi Progressive League, with the assistance of the NAACP, the CRC, and many sympathetic white politicians, demanded that the U. S. Senate remove Bilbo from office on charges that he violated both the Fifteenth

Voting Is Heavy; Some Negroes,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1946; “No Disorders Reported As Negroes Vote,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 2, 1946; “Official Vote In Senatorial Race,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 6, 1946; “Bilbo Vote Tops Opponents by 4,102,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1946.

⁴⁷ Quoting “Bilbo Calling For Extra Solon's Meet,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 12, 1946. “About the Elections,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 3, 1946.

Amendment and the *Smith v. Allwright* ruling by inciting a terror campaign to keep blacks from the polls. On September 19, 50 Mississippians, among them several whites, officially petitioned the senate to remove Bilbo. On September 24, a senate investigating committee examined Jones and Forrest and 20 other Mississippi counties because they had the most appalling records of voter discrimination. In 1946, 10 counties, including Jones and Forrest, had not registered a single black person. Moreover of the 1,337 registered blacks, only 264 of them voted. Although the dangerous racial environment in both Jones and Forrest counties stemming from the McGee case deterred blacks from cooperating in the investigation, the committee had greater success in other counties; 280 African Americans provided oral testimonials and 102 signed statements attesting to voter discrimination. Based on the committee's findings, Congressman Charles M. LaFollette demanded that the House of Representatives impeach Bilbo. On November 16, the committee unanimously agreed to hold an investigative hearing in Jackson.⁴⁸

The chair of the senate committee, Democratic Senator Allen Ellender of Louisiana, a segregationist of the Bilbo mold, tried to weaken the case. Because he refused to subpoena black witnesses, he placed blacks, who voluntarily appeared before the committee, in peril of white retaliation. He declined to force journalists, whose articles detailed Bilbo's rabble-rousing campaign rhetoric, to confirm the veracity of their reports. Finally, Ellender prohibited NAACP lawyers from acting as official counsel.

⁴⁸ "Impeachment of Bilbo Urged," *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1946; "Miss'ippi Vote Watched by Congress," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 1946; "Investigator's Report," Bilbo Papers; Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 24; Dittmer, *Local People*, 2, 3; Bilbo Petition, Bilbo Papers; *Bilbo Hearing*, 19; *Bilbo Investigation Report*; Resume of Facts, Mississippi Hearing, December 2-5, 1946, Bilbo Papers, [hereinafter cited as Resume of Facts, Bilbo Papers]; Forrest B. Jackson, A Reply to the Charles M. LaFollette Brief, January 3, 1947, Bilbo Papers [hereinafter cited as Jackson Brief, Bilbo Papers].

Still, CRC lawyer Emanuel Bloch and leaders of the National NAACP advised witnesses. To the chagrin of the segregationists, when the hearings opened on December 2, some 200 blacks arrived in Jackson and offered to testify against Senator Bilbo; hundreds more packed into the federal courthouse. Not a single witness from the Central Piney Woods dared to testify. All told, 68 of the 200 black witnesses testified that local authorities and white citizens had prevented them from exercising their right to vote. In some cases, registrars arbitrarily refused to register them. In others, when blacks approached the courthouse to register, angry whites beat them. As the black witnesses testified about the horrors they faced in the Mississippi election, Bilbo chuckled. Bilbo's excitement appeared infectious. The committee members frequently exchanged smiles, and Ellender winked at Bilbo several times.⁴⁹

Bilbo and his defense witnesses employed a four-fold strategy to rebut the charges of black witnesses. First, they claimed "outside influence" caused the racial terror. Second, they described the outbreak of violence as unusual and irregular. Third, they argued that blacks had not tried to participate in the Mississippi Democratic Primary since 1890 and only attempted to in 1946 because of outside influence. Rules governing

⁴⁹ Resume of Facts, Bilbo Papers; *Bilbo Hearing* (1946), 1-6, 17-21, 23-37, 46-333. "Magee Loses Battle for Change of Venue," and "Negro's Assault Trial to Open Monday in Laurel," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 9, 1946, in Exhibit R for Mississippi Investigation, 79th Congress, *Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 1946*, Records of the U. S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D. C. "Whipping Described At Bilbo Inquiry," December 2, 1946; "Bilbo Investigators Hear More Beating Accounts," December 3, 1946; "Policeman Tells Bilbo Probers He Hit Negro," December 4, 1946, "Bilbo Cites Law in Election Testimony," December 5, 1946, "Bilbo Ready for Second Inquiry," December 6, 1946 all in *Hattiesburg American*. "Senator Bilbo Campaign Investigated," December 4, 1946, "Senator Bilbo Will Have His Say Now," December 5, 1946, "Bilbo Has No Apologies for Campaign," December 6, 1946, all in *Laurel Leader-Call*. "20 Negroes Blame Vote Ban on Bilbo," *The New York Times*, December 3, 1946; Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 24; Dittmer, *Local People*, 2-9.

the Mississippi Democratic Party stipulated that participants must support Democratic candidates. Most white Democrats, including Bilbo, claimed that blacks could not truthfully do so. Finally, they contended that most Mississippi blacks stayed away from the polls out of apathy rather than fear. On the stand, Bilbo admitted that he exhorted white Mississippians to keep “niggers”—a racial slur he used 79 times during his testimony—from the polls, but he claimed to have implored whites to use nonviolent measures. He argued that the Democratic primaries should remain under complete white control because white Democrats had saved Mississippi from black-rule and the horrors of Reconstruction. He blatantly declared that “I believe in white supremacy, and I believe in white control, and I believe in the superiority of the white race over the nigger race.”⁵⁰

Although Ellender prohibited an official presentation of the LaFollette brief that called for Bilbo’s impeachment, Bilbo’s attorney, Forrest B. Jackson, responded to it in a motion to the committee. Jackson’s representation of Bilbo is curious considering a year earlier, when retained by the CRC, he saved McGee from the electric chair; now retained by Bilbo, he toiled to save the racist Mississippi statesman from impeachment. In his defense of Bilbo, Jackson attacked the CRC. He asserted that the brief supported by the NAACP and the CRC constituted a leftist—if not communist—effort to attack Jim Crow and its attendant political ideology. He emphasized that according to LaFollette’s own brief, those persons initiating the call for Bilbo’s impeachment came from black groups and persons affiliated with the communist party. Although Jackson concluded that the

⁵⁰ First and second quote, Lucius Jones, “Bilbo Defends White Supremacy: Senator’s Use of Derogatory Terms Highlights Hearings,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 14, 1946; third quote, *Bilbo Hearing* (1946), 347; *Ibid.*, 333-381. Statement of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo of the State of Mississippi in Response to Complaint and Charges Filed Against Him, to the Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, December 5, 1946, Bilbo Papers.

courts might consider Bilbo's language offensive, they could not characterize it as dangerous; neither could they find that his words incited a movement to prevent blacks from exercising their right to vote. The Ellender Committee, full of segregationists, agreed and refused to impeach Bilbo.⁵¹ Like McGee's trials, Bilbo's hearing was a charade of justice.

Enraged, several senators issued a minority report condemning the decision. They accused Bilbo of violating Section I of the Hatch Act, which made it unlawful "to intimidate, threaten, or coerce" a person "for the purpose of interfering with the right of such other person to vote," and of disobeying Section 52, Title 18 of the United States Code, which prohibited persons acting "under color of any law" from denying people their constitutional "rights, privileges, or immunities." The NAACP demanded that the federal government prosecute Senator Bilbo and all Mississippi officials who denied blacks their suffrage rights. When the Department of Justice failed to act, the NAACP and its congressional supporters planned to refer Bilbo's official seating to the Committee on Rules and Administration. In support of blocking the seating of Bilbo, Democratic Senator Glen H. Taylor from Idaho, pointed out that Bilbo had admitted membership in the Ku Klux Klan, and he compared Bilbo to Hitler. He also warned that if the senate failed to address Bilbo's constitutional violations and failed to protect American citizens' right to vote, the body would lose its integrity.⁵²

⁵¹ Jackson Brief, Bilbo Papers; *The Crisis*, 54 (January 1946): 18-19; Resume of Facts, Bilbo Papers.

⁵² Quoting *Senate Minority Report*, 1-10, Bilbo Papers; Charles H. Houston, "The Highway," January 8, 1947, Pt. 18, Ser. B, Reel, 4, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]; Leslie Perry to NAACP Branches,

Southern conservatives fought back. Ellender led a filibuster to prevent the senate from blocking Bilbo's resumption of his seat. The Mississippi legislature, citing claims to state sovereignty, passed a resolution demanding that the senate seat Bilbo. When Bilbo became ill in January; however, the senate tabled the debate. The NAACP kept the discussion alive by printing an editorial in *The Crisis* warning Americans about the dangers of men like Bilbo. They argued that Bilbo and men of his ilk had created a fascist regime that rivaled Hitler's Nazi Germany. The Bilbo case became moot on August 21, 1947 when "ironically" Bilbo died of mouth cancer. John Stennis, a dedicated white supremacist, who had briefly judged the McGee case, won the seat. Though Stennis used less abusive language than Bilbo, he aspired to the same goals. Bilbo's death failed to herald an era of racial moderation in Mississippi.⁵³ Widespread disfranchisement of blacks persisted. Radical and conservative white supremacists triumphed again.

Still, the black uprising against Bilbo represented the beginning, not the end, of massive black protest in the state. The very fact that blacks dared openly to renounce Senator Bilbo—one of the most infamous symbols of racial hatred in the state's history—revealed that the determination to force change moved powerfully in the Mississippi black consciousness. The crusade against Bilbo initiated the black suffrage movement in Mississippi. On a national level in 1947, the NAACP urged all branches to launch voting

December 28, 1946, Pt. 18, Ser. B, Reel 3, NAACP Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 8; Senator Glen H. Taylor, "Objection to Seating Theodore G. Bilbo," January 3, 1947, 80th Congressional Record, Pt. 18, Ser. B, Reel 4, NAACP Papers. For Taylor's party affiliation and years served see, U. S. Senators from Idaho, http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/senators/one_item_and_teasers/idaho.htm.

⁵³ Quoting Dittmer, *Local People*, 9. Ibid., 8; Mississippi Legislature, *A Concurrent Resolution Memorializing the Senate of the United States to Seat Senator Theodore G. Bilbo* (adopted by Senate March 5, 1947; adopted by House March 6, 1947), Bilbo Papers; Editorial, "Look Out America," *The Crisis*, 54 (February 1947): 41.

campaigns by canvassing, providing voter education courses, publicizing election days, and transporting blacks to the polls. The NAACP also focused on developing new branches across the South. Prior to the postwar period, Mississippi's six NAACP branches claimed only 129 members and acted in a mere "holding operation." Ten new Mississippi branches emerged between the war's end and 1947; 13 Mississippi branches had at least 50 members. By the fall of 1949, the NAACP had established a regional office in the southeast. Although by 1950, only 849 Mississippians belonged to the organization, the smallest number by far in the southeast region, Mississippi branches continued to grow, albeit slowly.⁵⁴

During these years, both Jones and Forrest counties established NAACP branches. White Mississippians' opposition to the NAACP rendered it nearly impossible for blacks who were dependent on whites for a living to join. Forrest County members mostly constituted the black bourgeois and included Vernon Dahmer and Major Bourne who owned farms, Charles Smith, a physician, Hammond Smith who owned a pharmacy, Robert and Constance Baker who owned a grocery store, and Alice Burns, a beautician. The president of the Jones County NAACP, Dr. Benjamin Murph, was a dentist, and Susie Ruffin made her living selling black newspapers like the *Jackson Advocate*. Still, the Laurel-Jones branch also had pioneer members whose livelihoods came from white-owned businesses and white bosses, including Maycie Gore, whose husband worked at the Masonite plant and Bertie Mae McGill, a maid. By the fall of 1952, the Forest County

⁵⁴ Dittmer, *Local People*, 29, 25-26, 30-31, 34; Editorial, "Look Out America," *The Crisis*. Mr. Current to Mr. Wilkins, September 19, 1949, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel, 1; Gloster Current to Ruby Hurley, September 18, 1950, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel, 3; NAACP Manual on Registration and Voting Campaign, Pt. 4, Reel, 9, all in NAACP Papers.

branch had 71 members. The Laurel-Jones branch planned to have some 200 members by the next year.⁵⁵

Joining the NAACP anywhere in Mississippi proved a dangerous act, and members became targets of angry white men. Robert Baker annoyed whites because he advocated black suffrage and because his business became quite lucrative; his ownership of a nice home and a new 1948 Oldsmobile added to the list of reasons whites despised him. When his son Robert Junior drove the new vehicle to a store, some local whites who “didn’t like the idea of a black guy having a shining black new Oldsmobile” assaulted him. When he returned home, his body brutalized from the beating, his father was outraged. Baker drove back to the store and berated his son’s attackers. They beat him worse than they had his son. Baker, a successful business man, and his wife, a beloved teacher, were among the black bourgeois. Yet in Jim Crow Mississippi, Baker had no legal recourse against white men. Still, the attack only intensified Baker’s commitment to the rising black struggle.⁵⁶ Surely, Baker looked to the shifts in the federal government that year with great hope.

In the late 1940s, President Harry Truman proposed sweeping civil rights legislation, including the abolition of the poll tax as a voting requirement in federal elections, eradication of segregation in interstate travel, the passage of an anti-lynching

⁵⁵ Ben and Mable Smith Fielder, interview by Neil R. McMillen, January 29, 1994, vol. 483, 30-32, MOHP. Frederick G. Burns interview, May 12, 2009, Douglass T. Baker interview, September 24, 2008, Maycie Gore interview, June 10, 2009, Johnny Magee interview, May 12, 2009, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings; Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, MOHP recording. L. B. to Ruby, November 18, 1951, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 3, NAACP Papers. Report by Ruby Hurley, May 7, 1951; Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, May 5, 1952, both in Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 5, NAACP Papers.

⁵⁶ Douglass T. Baker, interview.

bill, the creation of a permanent FEPC, and the increased empowerment of the Department of Justice to review civil rights cases. President Truman also integrated the military via Executive Order No. 981. Northern liberals supported the progressive federal trends, though many perceived them as too weak. White southern leaders scrambled to preserve the racial order through propaganda, and when that failed, they seceded from the party. In early 1948, Congressman Colmer formed a committee of 76 Congressmen from 11 southern states to fight Truman's proposal. That May, sensing the southern loss of control over the Democratic Party, Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright arranged a meeting of 5,000 prominent Mississippi Democrats against the rise of the "totalitarian state." When the National Democratic Party adopted a civil rights platform that summer, Mississippi and Alabama delegates walked out, founded the Dixiecrat Party, and ran South Carolina's Strom Thurmond for president and Mississippi's Wright for vice president. Meanwhile, liberals formed the Progressive Party with former Vice President Henry Wallace as their presidential candidate. During his southern tour, Wallace described the race issue as the most prevalent and distressing problem in the South and the nation, and he vowed to use federal power to dismantle segregation. The national Democratic Party split over the issue of race.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Quoting "The Conference of States' Rights Democrats Declaration of Principles," May 19, 1948, Jackson, Mississippi, Kenneth Toller Papers, Mitchell, MSU. Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 273. "Colmer Heads Dixie Group on Civil Rights," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 8, 1948, William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Colmer Papers]. For federal shifts, see, Dittmer, *Local People*, 27-28; Dewey E. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region At Odds* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 199; Victoria Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-3, 174-180; Victoria Bynum, "'White Negroes' in Segregated Mississippi: Miscegenation, Racial Identity, and the Law," *The Journal of Southern History*, 64 (May 1998): 249, 250-253.

Between 1946 and 1953, these racially charged political battles became entangled with racially charged economic battles when the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) launched Operation Dixie in its mission to spread biracial unionism in 12 southern states, including Mississippi. To force all American companies to recognize the union, the CIO needed to eradicate big business havens in non-union states. Mississippi topped the list in mistreatment of labor and paid the lowest salaries. Operation Dixie not only threatened the economic policies of the southern elite but the racial caste system because it sought to unite the working class across racial lines. Such developments could create class-based rather than race-based political alliances that would dismantle the racial caste system. The leader of Operation Dixie, Van A. Bittner, made it clear that the union would recruit both races in “organizing all the men and women of the South, because they all are God’s human beings.” After all, he pointed out: “a Negro gets just as hungry as a white man.”⁵⁸

CIO leaders established the Mississippi base of operations in Laurel and soon spread the movement to Hattiesburg. Many industries in Mississippi faced a series of strikes over the next several decades, particularly the Masonite Corporation in Laurel, which experienced seven major strikes between 1946 and 1967. Thomas Knight Sr., a white employee of Reliance Manufacturing Company in Hattiesburg, became one of the most influential unionists in Mississippi. After receiving training from Operation Dixie leaders, Knight began the process of unionizing Reliance Manufacturing by recruiting

⁵⁸ Quoting Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 64; *Ibid.*, xii, 22, 62-68; Eugene Albert Roper, “The CIO Organizing Committee in Mississippi, June 1946-January 1949” (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1949), 5-6; Dittmer, *Local People*, 23-24.

other employees and holding meetings. By 1948, Knight and other unionists had organized a powerful base inside the company. When Knight became president of the local union in 1948, he bucked his segregationist and patriarchal society and strove to register all workers regardless of race or gender. At the Hercules Plant in Hattiesburg, black unionists like Richard Boyd, helped the CIO acquire higher pay for workers and end some job discrimination.⁵⁹

Throughout Operation Dixie, the CIO faced opposition from the white establishment, which employed red-baiting and race-baiting tactics to divide the working class and turn citizens against the unions, a familiar refrain. Even before Operation Dixie, on May 20, 1946, Congressman William Colmer had linked unionism with communism when he condemned the CIO as a communist front. The CIO, he warned, had already developed a beachhead in Mississippi and planned an “invasion” of the South which if successful, promised to bring back the “carpet bag days.” He accused union leaders of recruiting “unsuspecting negroes” to their political base. To destroy Operation Dixie, company executives and managers sent their lackeys to convince black laborers that whites ran the union and only represented white interests; all the while, they persuaded whites that the CIO used Operation Dixie as a cover for civil rights reform. Knight noted that, “everything was to keep the mind off of trying to organize the unorganized.” In Laurel, when Operation Dixie organizers led a strike against Masonite, the local white establishment adeptly used the racial passions stemming from the McGee case,

⁵⁹ Dittmer, *Local People*, 24; “Many Dollars Lost By Work Stoppages,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 9, 1967, 4, in Masonite Strike Vertical File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM]. Thomas Knight, Sr., interview by Charles Bolton, February 7, 1992 and Richard Boyd and Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, August 29, 1991, both in MOHP Digital.

particularly the “lynching spirit” infecting white citizens, to divide black and white workers. The breach between the workers sent the strike into disarray and forced the union to end the protest and send the strikers back to work.⁶⁰

Ultimately, the CIO leaders determined that the union movement could only survive in the South if it capitulated to white supremacy. To repel race-baiting and red-baiting tactics, union leadership eventually purged its leftist members—most of whom were the only supporters of union integration. When the CIO won victories, such as an election for union control of the Masonite plant in Jones County, union leaders allowed white workers to usurp control of the operation and enforce Jim Crow policies. Soon, local white workers held segregated meetings, and the CIO political action committee mobilized white voters, while ignoring potential black constituents. By 1949, the CIO considered its Mississippi successes minor and retreated from the state, leaving behind scattered local unions generally dominated by racist whites. Knight was one of the few exceptions. Big business continued to control factory operations, and the racial caste system dividing the working class remained intact.⁶¹

In the meantime, however, the U. S. Supreme Court posed a threat to Mississippi’s racial order when it ruled in *Patton v. Mississippi* (1948) that the systematic exclusion of black jurors on grand and petit juries violated a defendant’s Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection under the law. McGee’s lawyers cited *Patton* in

⁶⁰ First, second, and third quotes, William Colmer, “The CIO and the South,” May 20, 1946, Congressional Sidelights, Colmer Papers; fourth quote, Thomas Knight, Sr., interview; last quote, CRC, “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel 35, CRC Papers. Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, 76.

⁶¹ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 274; Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor*, xvi, 161; Dittmer, *Local People*, 23-24; Thomas Knight, Sr., interview; “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers.

their appeal to the Mississippi Supreme Court and proved that for the past 30 years authorities had failed to select a single black juror to serve on a grand or petit jury in Jones County. The justices reversed the guilty verdict and remanded the McGee case to the circuit court. The new district attorney, Paul Swartzfager, was furious that he “had to . . . get a damn nigger on my grand jury.” He, and unnamed other Jones County officials, handpicked three blacks, Claude Arrington, Dr. T. J. Barnes, and T. D. Brown, for the job and ordered them to sit in a corner away from the 15 whites on the grand jury. The men were told to raise their hands when instructed. These few black jurors took their seats amidst hostile whites and unsurprisingly voted with their white counterparts to indict McGee.⁶²

Before the grand jury even indicted McGee, McGee’s lawyers withdrew from the case and later noted that they “were lucky to get out of it.” CRC hired Bella Abzug, a 26-year-old attorney, who had just passed the New York bar exam, to procure lawyers for McGee. No one in Laurel would even consider taking the case. In Jackson, after every lawyer she approached emphatically turned her down, she found A. N. London, a 23-year-old soft-spoken and elegant Jewish man who agreed to help and recruited his partner, John Poole, a 25-year-old trial lawyer, to take the lead in the case. Both men were freshly out of the University of Mississippi Law School and neither understood yet the danger they courted by accepting the case. Poole, a hard-drinking, pack-a-day smoker, who had suffered the loss of his father at a young age and the loss of his leg to a

⁶² Quoting Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 341; *Ibid.*, 339-340; *Patton v. State of Mississippi*, 332 U. S. 463 (1948); “No Negro On Jury, M’Gee Gets Re-Trial,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 9, 1948; “Indictment of McGee to be Sought Again,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 10, 1948, “Three Negroes on Grand Jury in Jones County by Court Orders First Time in History,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 16, 1948.

train accident when while a teenager, took on the case like a crusade. When McGee pled not guilty on February 19, 1948, his appearance had drastically changed. Dressed in a suit, he gazed hopefully at his new lawyers.⁶³

Although McGee's lawyers devoted themselves to the case, Jones County once again prevented McGee from receiving a fair trial. Despite the *Patton* precedent, McGee still faced an all-white petit jury; apparently, the white establishment considered placing blacks on the grand jury enough to satisfy the ruling. Judge Collins rejected motions to quash the indictment and the all-white jury venire. Poole and London also requested a continuance because they had only received the case three days earlier, and the jailor had restricted their access to McGee to three five-minute visits. Furthermore, they needed time to speak with two defense witnesses—Willie and Hettie Johnson—who they learned had relocated to Florida. Although Poole inferred that the Johnsons were “alibi” witnesses, in a later interview he mentioned that they knew about the affair, and he had hoped to bring them to Laurel to testify. Judge Collins gave them one week, rendering it impossible to locate the Johnsons and to prepare the defense. Judge Collins further inhibited the defense when he prohibited the lawyers from asking potential jurors if they would exonerate McGee if the defense proved that McGee and Hawkins had a consensual affair. The judge also denied the defense's change of venue motion even after the lawyers proved that frightened black witnesses refused to testify on behalf of McGee in Jones County. By 1948 white rage over the state's inability to execute McGee had exploded. As

⁶³ Quoting Dan Breland interview, 182, CRC Papers. *Ibid.*, 180-181. “McGee Enters Not Guilty Plea in Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 19, 1948; Leandra Zarnow, “Braving Jim Crow to Save Willie McGee,” *Law & Social Inquiry*, 33 (Fall 2008): 1014-1015; A. N. London, interview, 225-243, CRC Papers; Donna Mills interview, Radio Diaries; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 155-156, 161, 164.

the trial approached, the violent radical element in the white community that later founded the Klan, briefly abducted Swartzfager's eldest son Paul, Jr. to convey to Paul, Sr. that if he failed to convict McGee, he would jeopardize the welfare of his family. Moreover, Troy Hawkins hired a special prosecutor, Jack Deavours to ensure a conviction that the higher courts would uphold. Two years earlier Deavours had defended a white man who was convicted of raping a black child.⁶⁴

In the final courtroom drama, Swartzfager, Deavours, and County Attorney E. K. Collins presented the same weak case as their predecessors and like them, they relied on the myth of the black beast as their linchpin. They breathed life into the caricatures codified in the canon of southern lore, like Thomas Dixon's 1905 novel, *The Clansman* and D. W. Griffith's 1915 film adaptation, "Birth of a Nation." Set against the backdrop of Reconstruction, the tale portrayed whites as so devoted to the ideals of white patriarchy, that when a black man rapes a white virgin, she kills herself to protect her family honor. The Klan lynches the black rapist and restores white power. In Mississippi, white men had long before embraced their roles as warriors protecting their Madonnas. Their protection came at a price. When a white woman had sexual contact with a black man, even if raped, she found her pedestal pulled from under her as she was forced into a role of Eve, a fallen woman, forever stained and impure. By 1948 Hawkins had become intimately familiar with the misogynistic caricature. She declared on the witness stand: "It would be better for my family all the way around if he had just killed me. . . I don't

⁶⁴ Quoting, *Mississippi v. McGee*, 1268 (1948), 37. *Ibid.*, 4-37, 44-139, 365-400; 140-360; 365-400; "Willie McGee Jurors Are Being Seated," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 4, 1948; "State is Presenting Testimony In Willie McGee Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 5, 1948; Jon Swartzfager interview, Radio Diaries; John Poole interview, 287, 280, CRC Papers.

want to live . . . people look at me and say ‘That’s the woman that Negro man raped’ and I can hear them say it.” Hawkins would not kill herself to purge her family of the defilement, but her society expected her to use her testimony to help them legally lynch McGee and preserve the racial order. She tried.⁶⁵

Hawkins’ narrative the third time around was punctuated with black beast rhetoric and more than ever before she became a valiant victim desperately fighting the “brutal beast . . . the monster.” Her recast self did not resemble the passive victim surrendering to her attacker. Hawkins testified that she woke to a black intruder who ordered her to remain silent or face decapitation. “Of course I called [for Troy],” she claimed, “but he had just—Oh ! I was just scared that’s all.” She begged her attacker to leave and tried to push him away, but “he was so big and so rough, he was just a brute and there was nothing I could do.” Her daughter began to cry, and the intruder ordered her to “keep that damned brat quiet or I will cut her head open.” In the first trial, she had claimed no one woke. Hawkins emphatically denied that she consented to sexual intercourse, but she had lost considerable weight after an illness, rendering her too weak to effectively fight the attacker. When Deavours inquired how her rapist managed to take off her clothes, she became confused: “I unbuttoned them, they were jerked off, oh, I don’t remember how it was, but I did unbutton them, and I was stalling for time and he—” Deavours interrupted

⁶⁵ Quoting *Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1948), transcript, 511. *Ibid.*, 534-535. John Poole interview, 276-290; A. N. London interview, 235-245, both in CRC Papers. Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman* (New York: Gossett and Dunlap, 1905), 303-308, 315-374; “Birth of a Nation,” prod. and dir. by D. W. Griffith, Image Entertainment, 1915; Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 302; Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, 155; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 202-203, 208-223, 238-240; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 247-270; 294-296, 299-305; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 150-151.

and led her to provide the testimony he wanted, “Did you do that because the threats he made toward, you, Mrs. Hawkins?” She responded, “Oh, yes, I was so afraid.”⁶⁶

After the alleged rape, the assailant exited the home through the front door. He departed quietly without bumping into any furniture, which Hawkins could not understand as it “was the darkest morning I have ever seen.” She lay in her bed wondering what to do. Her daughter fell back asleep. Finally, she rose to check on her family and inform her husband of her rape. In her final narrative, her husband did not rush her to the doctor as she claimed in the first trial, nor did Troy Hawkins try to fix the electrical outage as he had professed in the first trial. Instead, they both rushed out of the home to the front porch where they started calling for their neighbors. Then, she “went all to pieces,” ran across the street, and banged on a neighbor’s window. When the defense pointed out the inconsistencies in her three testimonies, the prosecution led Hawkins to explain that she confused some details because the rape occurred so quickly and because the doctors put her on medications that afterward affected her memory.⁶⁷

Under the constant threat of a lynching, Poole and London presented the strongest defense of McGee to date. The prosecutors never asked Hawkins to identify McGee as her attacker, but Poole did. Hawkins claimed she could not identify him because it was dark, and she never saw his face. Poole inquired, “All you know is that he was a big monster of a Negro, that was what you thought?” She replied, “He was a Negro, and he was a beast.” Poole asked if the rapist was “a big old Negro, and as you termed it while

⁶⁶ First and second quotes, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 512, third quotes, *Ibid.*, 510; fourth and fifth quotes, *Ibid.*, 511, all other quotes, *Ibid.*, 514; *Ibid.*, 502-515. For testimony in first trial, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 2-11.

⁶⁷ Quoting *Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1948), 515-516. *Ibid.*, 517, 534-535. For testimony in first trial, see, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1945), transcript, 10, 17.

ago, a monster—” the prosecutors objected. Poole was trying to show the discrepancy in size between Hawkins’ description of the attacker and McGee’s average height. He asked her again, “He was a big man, then?” She responded, “You don’t have to be big to be a monster.” Yet she had just claimed during direct testimony that she was unable to prevent the rape because he “was so big.” The defense also pointed out how strange it seemed that neither Troy Hawkins nor the older two children awoke to her screams or that of her toddler and her desperate fight against her attacker in the small house in which all the bedroom doors were open. Hawkins grew hysterical on the stand and sobbed during her testimony and for long afterward in the witness room. The defense objected to Hawkins’ performance on the grounds that it prejudiced the jury.⁶⁸

The defense also vigorously objected to the admission of the confession as they considered it coerced. To prove their contention, McGee—outside the presence of the jury—took the stand and accused the officers of using intimidation, coercion, and violence to force him to sign a false confession. McGee told a story of police brutality and torture all too familiar to black Mississippians. In his bold stand against the authorities who brutalized him, he regained a sense of his humanity and masculinity. McGee informed the court about his arrest in Hattiesburg—how Officers Herring and Harris beat him on the street and then transported him to a holding cell in Forrest County where they beat him again—this time with slapjacks. He recounted the beating that he had received at the hands of a Laurel officer during the ride out of Hattiesburg and the chief’s threat to turn him over to a lynch mob. He declared: “How a man gonna say

⁶⁸ First, second, and third quotes, *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 518; fourth and fifth quotes, *Ibid.*, 524; last quote, *Ibid.*, 511. *Ibid.*, 518-533, 555-556, 528-530; 902-903; A. N. London, interview, 235-245, John Poole, interview, 299-301, both in CRC Papers.

anything everytime he open his mouth somebody hit him in the mouth[?]" He explained that Easterling, Deputy Royals, Officers Herring and Montgomery, and two black trustees continued to torture and beat him for weeks during his incarceration in Jackson. Between the beatings, authorities kept McGee locked in the hot box—a tiny space about the size of the witness chair located on the fifth floor of the jail. The box became so hot that McGee sweated profusely. Every so often they let him out and asked him to confess; when he refused, they beat him and returned him to the hotbox. McGee showed the court several scars on his head acquired from the beatings. He insisted that he only confessed because they threatened to “lynch me, hang me on a bridge,” and “I was scared to death way they had been treating me and threatening me, and I was tired of them knocking on me.”⁶⁹

The prosecution paraded the jailor, the former county attorney, and a series of law enforcement officers, including the chief of police and the sheriff, across the stand to deny McGee’s allegations. Easterling called McGee a “Smart Negro,” who was “instructed by somebody to tell you these lies.” When Deputy Royals claimed that he never beat McGee or anyone in his custody, Poole asked Royals if he was under indictment for beating a prisoner. The prosecution objected, and Judge Collins told him not to answer. The defense had done its research and found that in December 1947, the

⁶⁹ Quoting *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 724, 716, 875, respectively. *Ibid.*, 715-731, 873-875. For white authorities’ common use of coercion to extract confessions from accused blacks in Mississippi during Jim Crow, see McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 212-213; *Brown v. Mississippi* (1936); and Craig Zaim, “Trial by Ordeal,” 219, 226. On state sanctioned executions of blacks who violated the color line which the CRC refers to as “legal lynching,” see, CRC, “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet,” n. d., Part II, Reel 35, CRC Papers. Blacks in the Central Piney Woods continued to launch allegations against local police forces regarding police brutality over the next fifty years, see *Alvin Eaton et. Al, v. The City of Hattiesburg, Hugh Herring, Civil Service Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Paul Grady, Hattiesburg City Council* (1972) case no 724-30, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM.

Jones County court had indicted Royals on charges of committing assault and battery against Paul Murphey after arresting him and jailing him for drunkenness. Judge Collins declared that he had known the prosecution witnesses for many years as men with good characters and characterized McGee's testimony a "prefabricated story and I don't believe a word of it." He allowed the prosecution to present the confession.⁷⁰

Poole and London, like Pyles and Breland, invalidated the confession, showing how it contradicted the testimony of prosecution witnesses. When the prosecution mentioned fingerprints found on a window pane, Chief Valentine admitted under defense questioning that the prints proved too insubstantial to use as evidence. The defense also invalidated the other piece of physical evidence—McGee's undershorts. The stain had disappeared by the second trial, and the doctor who examined Hawkins after the rape testified emphatically that she was not menstruating. They also challenged the circumstantial evidence. Although the prosecution had successfully presented eye-witness testimony placing McGee's truck in Hawkins' neighborhood on the night of the rape, McGee's story of an affair could explain his presence. Finally the actions of Troy and Willette Hawkins in the aftermath of McGee's visit were more consistent with an affair than rape; it seems more plausible that Hawkins saw McGee leaving his home, accused his wife of adultery, and chased her out of their home during a raucous fight. Although the defense lawyers never presented McGee's narrative of the affair because of

⁷⁰ First and second quotes, *Mississippi v. Willie McGee* (1948), 755, third quote, 881; *Ibid.*, 637-715, 732-872. For charges against Royals, see, Indictment, December 8, 1947 and Acquittal, March 24, 1948, in *Mississippi v. J. P. Royals and T. F. Holliman* (1948), case no. 761, County Court, case file; *State of Mississippi v. J. P. Royals and T. F. Holliman* (1948), case no. 761, *Jones County, First District: Minute Books County Court*, vol. 3, 311, all housed at, Jones County Court, Ellisville, Mississippi; "Officers are Cleared in County Court," *Laurel Leader Call*, March 25, 1948.

the ubiquitous presence of lynch mobs, they managed to invalidate all of the prosecution's evidence, discredit their witnesses, and accuse the judicial system of brutalizing McGee and denying him his constitutional rights.⁷¹

The aggressive defense enraged white spectators and the more intimidating among them continued to threaten Poole and London throughout the trial. One state trooper even warned Poole that he had become a target of the mob. Poole's family had begun receiving threatening telephone calls, and Poole knew of the "vicious" reputation of the men in Laurel. At one point, while Poole met with McGee in the jail, a mob formed outside. He had to crawl on the catwalk that connected the jail to the courthouse to safely arrive in the courtroom. It proved a particularly difficult task for Poole with his one leg. Poole became increasingly frightened as the trial neared completion. In any conclusive closing argument, he knew that he would need to declare that Hawkins was McGee's lover, not his rape victim, but he also knew that he would not survive if he dared to make such a statement in 1948 Jones County, Mississippi. On March 6, the defense rested without presenting a single defense witness or a final argument. Still, the mob in the courtroom seemed hungry for a lynching. When the jury exited the courtroom for deliberations at 7:00 pm, Poole and London excused themselves to use the restroom and slipped out the back door where a secretly arranged police escort whisked them a block away to a vehicle that transported them out of town. Back at the courthouse, the jury deliberated for less than an hour. McGee stood at the defense table entirely alone

⁷¹ *Mississippi v. McGee*, 1268 (1948), transcript, 536-553, 588-597, 644-713, 882-891.

when for the third time, the jury found him guilty, and Judge Collins sentenced him to death.⁷²

London and Poole had fled the courtroom to save their lives, but they had not abandoned their client. They filed a motion with the Mississippi State Supreme Court for a new trial on the grounds that Judge Collins made several procedural errors from failing to change the venue to admitting the false confession. They also claimed that the jury erred in its verdict. The prosecution failed to present physical evidence or eye witness testimony tying McGee to the rape. The testimony by defense witnesses, full of inconsistencies and obvious lies, if anything, exonerated their client. McGee's story proved more believable. During the Jim Crow period, police brutality against blacks was pervasive. Authorities held McGee incommunicado for 30 days which bolstered the veracity of McGee's testimony that they forced him to confess. Despite the weight of the defense argument, in April 1949, the justices rejected McGee's appeal.⁷³

McGee's lawyers hit a wall of white supremacist resistance, and they had little hope that their appeals to federal courts or federal leaders would break through that wall; particularly as the federal government itself was in the throes of racial turmoil. In the November 1948 elections, the Democratic Party withstood the secession of Progressives

⁷² Quoting John Poole interview, 300, CRC Papers; *Ibid.*, 299-301; A. N. London interview, 270, both in CRC Papers. Donna Mills, interview, Radio Diaries; "McGee Put on Witness Stand," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 6, 1948; "Willie M'Gee Again Convicted," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 8, 1948; *Mississippi v. McGee* (1948), transcript, 908-909. Affidavit by John R. Poole, March 1948, Pt. I, Reel 10, [hereafter cited as Poole affidavit, CRC Papers].

⁷³ Motion For A New Trial, *Mississippi v. Willie McGee*, n. d., case no. [?], Pt. I, Reel 10, CRC Papers; George Marshall, "McGee Case—A Crime Against Humanity," *The Liberator*, Pt. II, Reel 35, CRC Papers; "Willie M'Gee Sentenced to Die June 3," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 11, 1949.

and the Dixiecrats. Progressive candidate Henry Wallace failed to win a single state in the 1948 presidential elections. The Dixiecrat candidates Strom Thurmond and Fielding Wright fared only slightly better, winning Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Louisiana. Both the Dixiecrats and the Progressives disbanded their parties by the end of the year. Although the Republican nominee, Thomas E. Dewey, won 16 states, Truman won in a landslide with 28 states. Moreover, Democrats swept the congressional elections, securing control of both houses. Americans generally supported Truman, some because of, and some despite of, his stand on racial issues. The Dixiecrats and Progressives rejoined the Democratic Party and over the next 16 years, as they battled for control of the Party, the struggle morphed into a fight between northern and southern politicians. The South generally won the early battles but confronted persistent threats to the racial order, particularly the NAACP fight to desegregate education. In 1948, the NAACP case *Sipuel v. Oklahoma State Regents* forced the University of Oklahoma to desegregate its law school. The victory encouraged the NAACP to launch several similar lawsuits over the next six years.⁷⁴

The racial passions that flared because of the McGee case, the Bilbo challenge, Operation Dixie, the NAACP suffrage and desegregation cases, and Truman's Civil Rights Commission exploded into a white supremacist firestorm. At the heart of all of these racial battles lay the fear of black men. A few years before Bilbo died, he declared

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 273; Dittmer, *Local People*, 27-28; "Truman Sweep: Election Returns a Mathematical Map," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1948, New York Times Article Archive, [hereinafter cited as NYT Article Archive]; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 180. For the history of desegregation of higher education cases, see *Gaines v. Canada* 305 U.S. 337 (1938); *Sipuel v. Oklahoma* 332 U.S. 631 (1948), *Sweatt v. Painter* 339 U.S. 629 (1950); *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* 339 U.S. 637 (1950); Richard Kluger. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1976), 255-284.

that miscegenation would prove more disastrous to the South than any other calamity: “When there are two streams that flow side by side and the barrier between is removed, they immediately begin to mingle their molecules. No power on earth could sift them out and restore them to their original purity.” He also forewarned any would-be Mississippi heretics that “just as we will not tolerate attacks on the color line from the outside we will have no such attacks from within our own borders.” In 1948, one such mixed stream created nearly a century earlier by the miscegenation of Newt Knight and his family’s former slave, Rachel, still existed in the “White Negro” community on the border of Jones and Jasper counties. For decades, the descendants of Knight and Rachel had lived a quiet existence under the radar of Jim Crow.⁷⁵

The recent threats to the Mississippi racial order, as well as renewed interest in the legendary Knight tale rendered the enclave vulnerable to white wrath. A son of Jones County, James Street, used the legend as the basis for his 1943 historical fiction, *Tap Roots*, and portrayed as heroic the interracial rebellion against the Confederacy. Knight became an American hero in 1948, when Hollywood adapted *Tap Roots* for the big screen. Meanwhile, Knight’s son, Thomas, republished a biography of his father that depicted him as a hero who protected innocent children and women against the depraved Confederacy, though unlike Street, he omitted mention of his father’s miscegenation. Many local whites found the glorification of Knight and the depredation of the Confederacy alarming because they considered Knight a traitor and an enemy to the men

⁷⁵ First and second quotes, Theodore G. Bilbo, “The War; Constitutional Government; and the Race Issue—America’s Greatest Unsolved Domestic Problem,” Senate: Extension of Remarks, April 17, 1944, 15, Bilbo Papers; last quote, Bynum, “‘White Negroes’ in Segregated Mississippi,” 252. *Ibid.*, 249-265; Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 2-3, 158-180.

they venerated —the Confederate soldiers who fought to sustain the southern way of life. They refused to suffer from southern marginalization as had their forefathers during the Civil War. So, they attacked the Knights. Before June 22, 1948, Mississippi had never prosecuted anyone under the miscegenation statute. After a grand jury found that Davis Knight had married a white woman, it indicted him on charges of miscegenation. Sheriff Hill swept into the Knight enclave and arrested Davis, a descendant of Newt and Rachel.⁷⁶

The trial of Davis Knight revealed the depths and the absurdity of racism. Mississippi law defined only those persons possessing one-eighth or more African ancestry as legally black. However, as most Mississippians classified all persons with black heritage a Negro—no matter how removed the ancestor—the trial proved a farce from the beginning. The marriage license of Davis Knight and Junie Lee Spradley, which identified the couple as white, served as the only material evidence admitted in the case. Prosecutor Paul Swartzfager easily established that the marriage took place and that Spradley was a Caucasian. Proving that Knight was legally a “Negro” proved more difficult. Knight’s attorney, Quitman Ross, created a reasonable doubt about his client’s racial makeup based on his appearance. Deputy Circuit Clerk Hannon Graves, who issued the marriage license, admitted that she thought Knight Caucasian because of his appearance and because he “came in with a crowd of White ladies.” Mayor J. M. Powell of Ellisville, who performed the marriage ceremony, never questioned the couple’s race.

⁷⁶ Bynum, “‘White Negroes’ in Segregated Mississippi,” 247-265. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*, 1-3, 158-180; “Husband Convicted in Intermarriage Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 18, 1948. Indictment of Davis Knight, Certification of Arrest of Davis Knight, Arraignment of Davis Knight, all in *State of Mississippi v. Davis Knight* (1948) case no. 646, Knight case file, Circuit Court, Ellisville, Mississippi.

After Ross clearly established that Knight appeared white, he tried to substantiate his client's whiteness by presenting Knight's military record that identified him as a Caucasian. Judge Burkitt Collins refused to admit the record.⁷⁷

The prosecution and the defense lacked genealogical proof to define Knight's race, as census records failed to identify the precise racial makeup of many of his ancestors. Census records simply classified his great grandmother Rachel as a slave. Though her contemporaries described her as mixed race, no genealogical proof existed to determine her racial heritage. Knight had two known "pure" white great grandparents, Newt and Serena. On his paternal side, his grandmother, Molly, (Newt and Serena's daughter) was "pure" white. Molly's husband, Jeffrey Early, was Rachel's son and thus of an undetermined mixed race, as was their son, Otho, (Davis Knight's father). On Knight's maternal side, he had one "pure" white great grandfather, Mat, (Newt and Serena's son). Mat's wife, Fannie, (Knight's maternal grandmother) was Rachel's daughter and thus she and their son, Henry, (Knight's grandfather) had an undetermined racial background. Henry married Ella, who had an unknown mix of black and white ancestry. It proved impossible to identify the precise racial ancestry of their daughter, Addie, (Davis Knight's mother).⁷⁸

Since the prosecution lacked material means to determine Knight's precise racial makeup, Swartzfager based his entire case on witnesses who characterized Rachel as

⁷⁷ Quoting *State of Mississippi v. Davis Knight* (1948), case no. 646, transcript, 5, 8, 7, Mississippi Supreme Court record, *Davis Knight v. State of Mississippi* (1949), case no. 37,205, transcript, 5, 8, 7, MDAH, *Ibid.*, 3-9, 82, 111-112, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Knight* (1948), transcript].

⁷⁸ Bynum, "White Negroes in Mississippi," 256-266; Bynum *The Free State of Jones*, 180-185 and Appendix 9, 206-207.

African to prove her descendants possessed enough black blood, as they said in those days, to render Davis black. These witnesses characterized Rachel and her descendants as black based on their perceptions of “negroid” features, and several of them claimed that these Knights had certain negative personality traits, which they insisted only Negroes possessed. Newt’s white son, Thomas, and five other witnesses characterized Rachel as black because “she had kinky hair, a wooly head . . . she was colored like one.” They said that she had a “flat nose” and “thick lips.” On cross-examination, these witnesses all conceded that most whites considered persons who possessed any degree of “Negro blood” a Negro. Most witnesses admitted that Knight’s grandfather, Early, had lighter skin and straighter hair. One witness tried to clarify: “he was not as black as some Negroes . . . he was what you call a yellow looking fellow.” Another defined Early as a “Negro” because “he imitated a Negro” with his impudent behavior, conduct apparently he believed only black persons exhibited.⁷⁹

Most white Mississippians also perceived all whites who publicly engaged in sexual relations with blacks as becoming black. Witnesses for the prosecution reflected that belief when they testified that they considered Otho’s wife, Addie, a Negro because she married a Negro and lived among people categorized as Negroes. These witnesses, like Bilbo, perceived whites and blacks as existing in two separate streams that once mixed produced a polluted group unacceptable in white circles and condemned to live as the hated race. The simple statement by many witnesses that they considered any person with any degree of black heritage, black, and persons living with black persons as black,

⁷⁹ Last quote *Mississippi v. Knight* (1948), transcript, 64, all other quotes, *Ibid.*, 73. *Ibid.*, 11-12, 47, 55, 62, 64, 66, 69, 74-76. Bynum, “White Negroes in Mississippi,” 256-266.

rendered the entire trial a charade. The moment the grand jurors indicted Knight for miscegenation, they had condemned him. After the defense rested, the jurors returned a guilty verdict within 15 minutes, and Judge Collins sentenced Knight to five years in prison. Quitman Ross appealed the conviction to the Mississippi Supreme Court.⁸⁰

Ross alarmed the patriarchs when he argued in his appeal that Mississippi's miscegenation statute violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. He pointed out that a California court in *Perez vs. Lippold* found a state statute that nullified interracial marriages between whites and "Negroes, Mongolians, members of the Maylay race, or mulattos" unconstitutional. To prevent a federal judicial invasion, Mississippi Attorney General Greek L. Rice assumed the case. He requested that the Mississippi Supreme Court reverse the decision because the prosecution lacked material evidence to identify Rachel as a "fullblooded Negro" and because the witnesses generally admitted that they characterized all persons with any Negro heritage as belonging to the black race, an assumption inconsistent with Mississippi law. Rice worried that during an era when civil rights organizations were challenging the constitutionality of *de jure* segregation, the U. S. Supreme Court might find miscegenation statutes unconstitutional. The Mississippi Supreme Court reversed and remanded the case, but prosecutors never tried Knight again. They ruined and exiled him instead. Knight's wife divorced him; he lost his business; and he moved to Texas where he again passed as a white man until 1958 when he died in an automobile accident.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Mississippi v. Knight* (1948), transcript, 21, 25-26, 70-71, 77-78; "Husband Convicted In Intermarriage Case," *Hattiesburg American*, December 18, 1948; Motion and Appeal, *Mississippi v. Knight* (1948), transcript, 28-30.

Jones Countians perceived miscegenation at the heart of the “holy war” to sustain segregation and perceived the exile of Knight and the coming execution of McGee as great triumphs against the enemy. On June 2, 1949, whites in Jones County began flocking to the courthouse to celebrate McGee’s execution set for midnight. McGee waited for his death in the adjacent jail. Then, at 7:00 p.m., Poole and London received word that the U. S. Supreme Court would consider their appeal, which forced the Mississippi State Supreme Court to sign a stay of execution. However, the justices, except W. G. Roberds, went into hiding. When Poole located Justice Roberds with the order from U. S. Supreme Court, Roberds said “Well, thank goodness, you got here . . . I never did believe this fellow was guilty anyhow.” From Jackson, Poole called Sheriff Steve Brogan in Laurel with court orders to stop the execution; but the sheriff refused to accept the order over the telephone. He suggested Poole acquire a police escort to Laurel to protect him from the likelihood of a lynching. When Jackson officers refused to provide an escort, Poole, armed with a gun, headed toward Laurel alone, though state police finally joined him. Unbeknownst to the gathering mob at the front of the courthouse, Sheriff Brogan who had received the order for the stay at 8:25 p.m., ushered McGee out the backdoor, into his vehicle, and they sped toward Jackson. Safely back in his Jackson cell, McGee trembled in fear, but he smiled at the Sheriff: “Faith in God was

⁸¹ First quote Brief of Appellant, *Davis Knight v. The State of Mississippi*, September 28, 1949, case no. 37,205, 22-24, Mississippi Supreme Court records, transcript, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as *Knight v. Mississippi* (1949), transcript]; second quote, Brief of the Appellee, *Knight v. Mississippi* (1949), 13. Ibid., 14-19; Opinion of the Court, *Davis Knight v. State of Mississippi*, November 14, 1949, case file, Circuit Court, Ellisville, Mississippi; “Knight Legend Lives on Mulatto Offspring,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, October 6, 1977, Newton Knight Descendants Vertical File, LRM.

the only thing that saved me.” Not long after issuing the stay, the U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case.⁸²

So Poole appealed again, this time with a bold argument that accused Hawkins of fabricating the rape story and charged the prosecution with “procuring perjured testimony” from Hawkins and from law enforcement officers. After Poole and his new partner on the case, CRC lawyer Emanuel Bloch, delivered the petition to Judge Collins on July 21, 1950, Troy Hawkins, who somehow heard of Poole’s arrival, rushed toward Poole, shouting “[you] dirty son of a bitch.” Hawkins tried to punch Poole, but Poole ducked. He and Bloch ran inside the police station where they demanded protection. Laurel’s Mayor Carroll Gartin interceded, but refused them a police escort. Finally, the county attorney persuaded Hawkins to leave the premises. Once securely back in Jackson, Poole requested that Judge Collins change the venue for the petition hearing. He refused. Poole appealed to Governor Wright, but to no avail. Fearing for their lives, the lawyers requested Judge Collins use the petition as the defense’s argument in the case. Instead, the judge dismissed the petition and claimed that the defense lawyers had voluntarily abandoned their client. Easterling, Mayor Gartin, Swartzfager, and Collins hoped to terminate future appeals in the case by filing a petition to disbar Poole on the

⁸² First quote, Bynum, “White Negroes’ in Segregated Mississippi,” *The Journal of Southern History*; 255 second quote, A. N. London, interview, 247, CRC Papers; third quote, “Willie McGee Escapes Death Chair,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 3, 1949; “Willie Ready to Die and Chair Set Up,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 3, 1949; “Execution of Framed Negro Vet Halted by Last Minute Action,” News Release, June 3, 1949, Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers; Petition for Rehearing to the Supreme Court, *Mississippi v. Willie McGee*, October 1949, Pt. II, Reel, 10, CRC Papers; “End of Trail Nears for Willie M’Gee,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 10, 1949.

grounds that he perjured himself in his petition and that he worked for the CRC, a communist organization.⁸³

On July 26, 1950 when authorities returned McGee to the Jones County jail to await his execution scheduled for midnight, he clung to the hope that his lawyers would save him from the chair once again. The good news came. The U. S. Supreme Court had granted a stay pending the Mississippi Supreme Court's response to a new appeal, authored by Bella Abzug. By 1:00 that afternoon, word of the stay spread to whites crowding around the Jones County courthouse. Enraged denunciations of the decision developed into talk of lynching. McGee's police escort failed to arrive for nearly three hours, allowing time for the mob to grow. To avoid the mob, Deputy Royals led McGee out of his cell, and they crawled on the catwalk that connected the jail to the courthouse. As they exited the courthouse, they ran for Royal's vehicle. A man congregating with the mob by the jail noticed and whistled to alert the crowd. The mob turned and ran toward McGee. One man lunged toward McGee and struck him on the back of the head. McGee staggered, but he did not fall. Royals shouted, "run for it Willie" as another man came toward McGee and swung at him. Moments before the men reached them, McGee and Royals climbed inside the vehicle, and Royals sped past the howling mob.⁸⁴

⁸³ First quote Petition for Writ of Error Coram Nobis, *Mississippi v. McGee*, July 21, 1950, 9, McGee case file; second quote, Poole Affidavit, CRC Papers; "Writ of Coram Nobis Petition For Willie McGee Dismissed When Defense Fails to Appeal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 22, 1950; A. N. London interview, 227, CRC Papers; "Disbarm't of McGee's Lawyers Asked," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 22, 1950.

⁸⁴ Quoting "McGee is Snatched From Death Twice," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 27, 1950. Petition for Stay of Execution, *Mississippi v. Willie McGee*, July 25, 1950 and United States Supreme Court Order for Stay of Execution, *Willie McGee v. State of Mississippi*, July 16, 1950, United States Supreme Court, both in Record Group 27, J. P. Coleman Papers, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as Petition for Stay, *Mississippi v. McGee*

The mob grew enraged. Men railed against the Supreme Court and the federal government. Talk of organizing a lynching party to abduct McGee from Jackson surfaced, but no one seriously considered the idea. That night, Swartzfager led the mob into the courthouse where he, along with Judge Collins, Mayor Gartin, and Attorney Easterling discussed how to combat the communist influence that they claimed had infiltrated their county and awarded McGee his reprieve. The leaders and the mob formed a citizens' league to fight communism. Within a week, Laurel adopted a law that banned communists from the city, prohibited the circulation of communist literature, and penalized violators with a \$100 fine and 30 days in jail. Perhaps, now the CRC agitators would leave, and they could eliminate McGee.⁸⁵

The CRC, however, only grew more determined to save McGee and advance its cause of promoting communism as the only means to dismantle white tyranny. Two years earlier, in the summer of 1948, William Patterson, a 57-year-old African American communist, became the National Executive Secretary of the CRC because George Marshall had been sent to prison on contempt charges for refusing to provide HUAC with records from the defunct National Federation for Constitutional Liberties—the precursor to CRC. In 1949, Patterson struggled to turn the McGee case into a global crusade. Patterson had a wealth of experience to bring to the McGee case. During the 1920s, Patterson had joined the Communist Party, U.S.A. and worked on the Sacco-Vanzetti

(July 1950), Coleman Papers, and Order for Stay, *McGee v. Mississippi* (July 1950), Coleman Papers]; “U. S. Judge To Hear McGee’s Last Plea,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 26, 1950; “U. S. Judge To Hear McGee’s Last Plea,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 26, 1950; “Judge Collins Flays Reprieve of McGee,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, July 28, 1950.

⁸⁵ “McGee is Snatched from Death Twice,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 27, 1950; “Judge Collins Flays Reprieve of McGee,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, July 28, 1950; “Laurel Adopts Ban on Reds,” Willie McGee Trials, Crimes—Violent Vertical Files, LRM.

case in 1927 and later the Scottsboro case. In 1932 he ran for mayor of New York on the communist ticket. He had spent six years in Russia, married a Russian woman and had two daughters, but when he returned to America, he was not allowed to bring them with him. Patterson perceived communist agitation as the key to McGee's liberation and that of all African Americans. Because communists opposed fascism, he argued that blacks needed "the aid of all other forces fighting fascist ideas." He also blamed the U. S. federal government for black suffering because it possessed the constitutional powers to terminate the oppression of Jim Crow and its systematic use of "violence and terror," but it feigned "impoten[ce]." Thus, Patterson argued that only by linking the black struggle with the struggle of all oppressed people across the world could blacks achieve liberation.⁸⁶

The CRC had much experience in these matters. During the McGee case, the CRC, as well as the NAACP, launched a myriad of battles against Jim Crow justice in highly publicized cases including the interracial rape trials of Virginia's Martinsville Seven and Florida's Groveland Four as well as the interracial murder trial of Georgia's Ingram family. On the legal front, they built upon the Scottsboro and *Brown v. Mississippi* precedents that obliged states to provide all defendants with their constitutional rights to freedom from coercion and bodily harm in interrogations, the right to adequate counsel, and a fair trial by a jury by their peers. On the political front, the CRC and the NAACP characterized these trials as "legal lynchings" because the police

⁸⁶ Quoting William L. Patterson to the Editor, *New York Times*, July 21, 1949, NYT Article Archive. Les Ledbetter, "William Patterson, Lawyer, Dead At 89," *New York Times*, March 7, 1980, NYT Article Archive; Charles H. Martin, "'The American Dilemma: The Civil Rights Congress and the Genocide Petition to the United Nations,'" *Journal of American Ethic History*, 16 (Summer 19947): 35-61; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 187-188.

state had replaced the mob as the enforcer of racial control. They demanded that the federal government intervene to terminate Jim Crow justice. Cooperation between the CRC and the NAACP was rife with conflict, particularly because leaders like Thurgood Marshall worried that the CRC's communist affiliations might damage these cases. The NAACP, however, stayed out of the McGee case for nearly five years, leaving the CRC to shape its own strategy.⁸⁷

Of all these racial cases, the McGee struggle became particularly unique between the spring of 1949 and 1951 when the CRC internationalized the McGee crusade in a propaganda campaign that inspired world empathy. However, the campaign was based on as many lies as truths. It seems the CRC considered McGee's statement about the affair truthful, but problematic. McGee portrayed himself as a cocky, reckless womanizer who drank and gambled too much, cheated on his wife, Eliza, with several black paramours, willingly committed adultery with Hawkins, even making love to her in the home she shared with her husband, and became a party—no matter how helpless—to a murder plot to kill her husband.⁸⁸ Any one of these transgressions could easily turn a jury and the public against the accused; but particularly during the forties and fifties in white America, a black male defendant had to appear as pure and as unthreatening as possible.

⁸⁷ Leandra Zarnow, "Braving Jim Crow to Save Willie McGee," 1003-1041; Craig Zaim, "Trial by Ordeal: The Willie McGee Case," 215-247; Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro*; Eric W. Rise, "Race, Rape, and Radicalism: The Case of the Martinsville Seven, 1949-1951," *The Journal of Southern History*, 58 (August 1992): 461-490; Steven F. Lawson, David R. Colburn, and Darryl Paulson, "Groveland: Florida's Little Scottsboro," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 65 (July 1986): 1-26; Charles Martin, "Race, Gender, and Southern Justice: The Rosa Lee Ingram Case," *The American Journal of Legal History*, 29 (July 1985): 251-268; *Brown vs. Mississippi* (1936); *Powell vs. Alabama* (1932).

⁸⁸ First quote, McGee Statement, 319, second quote, *Ibid.*, 325. *Ibid.*, 320-324; A. N. London interview, 231, all in, CRC Papers.

Ultimately, the CRC leaders determined that the tyrannical white supremacist government and the black beast dogma proved so formidable in Mississippi and fear of black masculinity in the South and America at large so palpable, that they could never prevent the execution of a black man in an interracial charged rape case without emasculating and purifying him, and demonizing his white accuser and her society.

To that end, in political and legal theaters, CRC leaders and lawyers staged a Mississippi morality play that inverted the racial and gender caricatures of the black beast mythology to portray McGee as the hapless male-Madonna, subject to the whims of an evil white Jezebel and the white beastly men who controlled the tyrannical state. They exploited the Manichean and Christian philosophy at the core of the American psyche that drove the citizenry to see the world through the prism of good and evil. To set a stage for their villainous and heroic stock characters, they likened Mississippi's white supremacist tyranny to Hitler's Aryan dictatorship, and portrayed McGee as a victim in a southern holocaust. But McGee's defenders also washed him of his sins by erasing from McGee's past his other affairs, his initial willingness to engage in an extramarital affair with Hawkins, and Hawkins' murder plot. They portrayed him as a simple and irresponsible, but loveable *Negro* devoted to his wife and children. Hawkins became the white Jezebel who made McGee her sex slave. Ironically, the CRC's white beast morality play, like the black beast mythology, dehumanized McGee and deprived him of the manhood he so coveted.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ In Leandra Zarnow's study of the McGee case, she emphasizes that one of McGee's lawyers, Bella Abzug, understood the dual oppression suffered by white women and blacks in Mississippi's racial patriarchy, but she disagrees that Abzug joined the CRC's efforts to portray Hawkins as a Jezebel caricature. See Leandra Zarnow, "Braving Jim Crow to Save Willie McGee," 1003-1041. In Susan Brownmiller's analysis of the

The CRC needed the help of McGee's wife to sell the story. However, soon after McGee's arrest, Eliza divorced him and fled. In 1949, a woman named Rosalee McGee who claimed she was Willie McGee's wife suddenly appeared on the scene. As the members of the McGee defense team are deceased, the actual identity of Rosalee McGee and her motivations for posing as Willie McGee's wife remain unknown. It also remains unclear if she came to the CRC team members or if they found her. Speculations abound that she was one of McGee's former lovers, a relative, a friend, or a paid actor. Alex Heard, whose *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee* details his personal search for the truth in the McGee case, contends Rosalee was a poor country girl from Lexington, Mississippi who likely met McGee while visiting her cousin on death row in Jackson; and somehow the two of them concocted the elaborate story. Yet it seems doubtful that the two acted alone, for surely by 1949, the CRC team had a thorough history of McGee's background, which would include his marriage and divorce from his wife Eliza and how and why she left him and fled with their children to Nevada. It is also nearly certain that McGee's legal team would have read the statement that he had given Forrest Jackson because George Marshall of the CRC retained him, and Jackson had passed the statement along to Pyles. Finally, Patterson had a pattern of lying in other cases, most notably in the Martinsville Seven case. Although the Martinsville defendants were guilty of rape, Patterson "led the CRC to fabricate stories of their innocence."⁹⁰

McGee case, she overlooked Abzug's distress over her decision, but she recognized the ultimate decision by Abzug and the other CRC lawyers and leaders to demonize Hawkins, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1975), 233-247.

⁹⁰ Quoting Eric W. Rise, "Race, Rape, and Radicalism," 489. For Eliza fleeing the state, and for speculation about the identity and motivation of Rosalee McGee, see

Whatever the actual identity of the Rosalee McGee appearing in the CRC record or her actual relationship to McGee, she became an important player in the Mississippi morality play. She helped the CRC weave a tale of white malevolence and black victimhood when she and Willie claimed in affidavits that Willette Hawkins ordered Willie to work at her house so she could force him into bed with her. The affair only continued because Hawkins threatened to cry rape if McGee rejected her. When McGee informed Rosalee of his sexual subjugation, she tried to help him, but it pained her and they separated. On the night before the alleged rape, Troy Hawkins unexpectedly came home around 10:30 p.m. and found McGee asking his wife for money. Suspicious of McGee's presence, he grabbed McGee by the arm and shouted: "What in the God Damn Hell does this mean?" McGee wrenched himself free and fled the home. He went on a gambling spree with friends and ended up at Hattie Johnson's home around 11:00 pm where he gambled and drank whiskey until 5:45 the following morning—an hour after the alleged rape took place. According to Rosalee, Troy Hawkins must have found out about the affair, for rumors spread in Laurel that he chased his wife out of their home and "they say her husband was about ready to kill her that night. So I guess to save herself from her husband she figured she would say she was raped and get Willie lynched."

Bridgette McGee-Robinson narration and interview; Della McGee Johnson interview; Donna Mills interview; Liz Abzug interview, all in Willie McGee Project, Radio Diaries. McGee's lawyers in his second trial mention his wife had left him by the time they defended him, see Dixon Pyles interview, 313, CRC Papers. A woman named Rosalie McGee, allegedly a distant relative of Willie, and the sister of Hattie Johnson, worked in the home of Willette Hawkins' sister, and she later told an interviewer that Willie McGee and Hawkins were lovers. Perhaps, she is the same Rosalee who posed as McGee's wife. Her interview is in the Jessica Mitford papers, see, Leandra Zarnow, "Braving Jim Crow to Save Willie McGee," 1008n. For Heard's theory and evidence, see, Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 211-213, 218-219, 273, 345-346.

Rosalee would later declare rather famously, “If there was any raping done, It was Mrs. Hawkins who raped my husband!”⁹¹

The mention of Hattie Johnson proved particularly curious. In the third trial, Poole had asked for a continuance to locate a Hettie Johnson, surely the same person, and in the first trial, Bill Barnes testified that he and Willie spent their last hours together on Friday morning gambling at Hettie Johnson’s home. The CRC eventually claimed that they had located Johnson in Florida and that Hettie swore in an affidavit that she worked for Troy Hawkins’ aunt, Delia Lennon. According to Johnson, on the morning of the alleged rape, she arrived at the Lennon home at 7:30 a.m. and found the white family in a considerably agitated state. “Something awful had happened to [Willetta],” Lennon told Johnson; a “nigger” broke into the home and “raped her.” Are you sure that he was a “colored man?” Johnson asked, and Lennon claimed that Hawkins was certain because she “felt his hair.” Still, Lennon wondered if maybe Hawkins simply had a bad dream because the entire incident seemed illogical. Lennon could not understand how an intruder could break into Hawkins’ small home and commit such a violent crime without waking anyone. Johnson avoided further discussion with the white family about the incident because they were “not of her color,” and she considered it “wiser to keep her mouth shut.” Then at dinner, Lennon announced that a man named Willie McGee committed the rape. Shocked, Johnson blurted out that McGee could not possibly have

⁹¹ First and second quotes, Petition for Habeas Corpus and McGee Affidavits, *Willie McGee v. Albert Jones and Steve D. Brogan* (February 1951), case no. [?], 1-44, United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi, RG 27, Coleman Papers, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as *McGee v. Jones* (February 1951), petition]. Johnson Affidavit, CRC Papers; “Mrs. McGee’s Own Story,” Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel, 7, NAACP Papers. Rosalee McGee to The Civil Rights Congress, May 20, 1949, Pt. I Reel 10, CRC Papers. These accounts contradict McGee’s statement in Dixon Pyles interview, 319-325, CRC Papers.

raped Hawkins last night because he spent the entire night gambling at her house. Despite Johnson's claims, police arrested McGee. Still Johnson planned to testify for the defense. Armed soldiers, policemen, and deputy sheriffs guarded Johnson during the one-day trial and then suddenly a white man she did not know entered the room and warned Johnson that if she testified she could "get in trouble" for providing McGee and his friends with whiskey and allowing them to gamble in her home. Authorities dismissed Johnson and soon afterward, she left the state.⁹² In McGee's original statement, he claimed that after gambling, he visited Hawkins. The new narrative transformed McGee into an innocent victim, trying to avoid Hawkins. The CRC story also gave McGee an alibi.

On the world stage, Rosalee and the CRC team played the warriors for justice in this morality play as they fought to save McGee from the white beasts and the black race from racial tyranny. In his speeches and writings, Patterson likened the Mississippi white tyranny to Hitler's Nazi empire by characterizing its state sanctioned lynchings of black men to prevent miscegenation as "genocide, exactly paralleling Hitler's racist mass murder." He also indicted the federal government for allowing the triumph of evil: "Legal lynchings are perpetrated by the police arm of the government's administration branch, upheld by the legislative branch which refuses to outlaw jim crow terror, and allowed to continue by the judicial branch which declines to intervene." Patterson recruited white women's groups by declaring that rather than being part of "the world of the lynchers,"

⁹² Quoting Affidavit by Hattie Johnson, March 4, 1951, CRC Papers. To compare Johnson's affidavit to testimony, see, *Mississippi v. McGee*, 1268 (1948), 536, 504, Wiletta Hawkins testified that she went to sleep around 3:40, and the alleged rape had not yet happened. For McGee's arrest, see, "Another Negro is Jailed in Assault Case Investigation," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 5, 1945, 1. According to Heard, Hawkins had a sister named Delia Leonard. It seems this was just a misspelling in the affidavit. It also appears that like the affidavits by Willie and Rosalee McGee, the Johnson affidavit was a mix of truth and lies.

they could join “the other America” of whites who had opposed slavery and fought for black rights during Reconstruction. The CRC staged demonstrations outside the White House, led marches into Congressional offices, sent a series of delegations including a white woman’s group to Mississippi, and orchestrated letter writing campaigns to President Truman and Governor Fielding Wright. The crusade galvanized protests around the world among European politicians, intellectuals, and journalists; as well as the Chinese Communist Party and luminaries including Phillip Morrison, Paul Robeson, and William Faulkner. During the World Health Conference in Switzerland, someone pasted a sticker on Senator Richard Nixon’s vehicle denouncing McGee’s “legalized lynching.”⁹³

The CRC tried to capture the racial terror in Laurel by publishing and circulating the correspondence written by Rosalee and Willie McGee. The letters portrayed Rosalee as a particularly moving and inspirational character who steadfastly supported her

⁹³ First and second quotes, William Patterson, “The Case of Willie McGee,” Pt. II, Reel, 35, CRC Papers; second and third quotes, Ann Braden, interview “Joining the Other America,” excerpts, n. d., Veterans of Hope Project, website: <http://www.veteransofhope.org/show.php?vid=34&tid=44&sid=72> (accessed July 2009), [hereinafter cited as Ann Braden, interview, Veterans Hope Project]; fourth quote Charles Grutzner, “Truman Attacked by Nixon on ‘Bias,’” *The New York Times*, October 20, 1952, NYT Article Archive. For McGee’s role, see, Willie McGee’s affidavit (February 3, 1951) and Rosalee McGee’s affidavit (July 25, 1950), 19-20, 23; Mrs. McGee’s Own Story,” NAACP Papers. For the various protests, see “District Attorney Takes Blast at Willie McGee Supporters,” *The Laurel Leader Call*, March 29, 1951; “Communists Out in Open Now in McGee Pleas,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 28, 1951; “Willie McGee is Turned Down Again by U. S. Supreme Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 26, 1951; “State Department Telling London About McGee Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 27, 1951; “A Program of Action to Save Willie McGee,” February 22, 1951, CRC Pamphlet, Pt. II Reel, 42, CRC Papers; “A Partial Victory for the People,” March 19, 1951, CRC Chapter Bulletin, Pt. III, Reel, 2, CRC Papers; “Peace Crusaders Celebrate As Willie McGee is Granted a Stay of Execution by Judge,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 16, 1951; “4th Death Date Set For McGee,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 9, 1951. “Chinese Red Protest McGee Case To Truman,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1950; “Peace Crusaders Storm Washington,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 1951; John N. Popham, “Six Urge Clemency For Doomed Negro,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 1950, all in NYT Article Archive.

husband in the face of constant threats on her life. When her employer tried to prevent her from visiting McGee, she quit. After she praised the CRC to other blacks and requested that they join, whites threatened her. Although she eventually moved to Jackson to find work as a domestic, she refused to leave Mississippi, declaring: “if I began to run, I can’t fight.” One of the more poignant letters published by the CRC allegedly came from McGee’s children. They asked, “When can my daddy come home? . . . He been gone so long. . . people tell me my daddy will die on hot seat. . . . I love my daddy and we need him. . . . Don’t let him die.” The letter was signed with the names of McGee’s four children Della Ree, Gracie Lee, Mary Lee, and Willie Earle. People on both sides of the McGee case knew Eliza had divorced Willie, took their children to Nevada, and neither she nor the children had contact with him again. But at the time and for the next 60 years, no one in any public record questioned Rosalee’s authenticity.⁹⁴

Enraged by the CRC’s attack on its racial order, Mississippi’s white Leviathan rose to destroy the CRC and the McGee crusade with a two-pronged approach—red-baiting and racial terror. The patriarchs launched a massive Red Scare campaign that maligned the CRC as an agent of the Soviet Union. The CRC, they claimed, twisted racial cases like the McGee rape trials to incite racial divisiveness, undermine American justice, and convert citizens, particularly blacks, to communism. On July 31, 1950 in the United States capital, Mississippi Congressman William Colmer launched a diatribe

⁹⁴ First quote, Rosalee McGee to William Patterson, August 1, 1950, Pt. I, Reel, 10; second quote, Della Ree, Gracie Lee, Mary Lee, and Willie Earle McGee to the CRC, n. d., Pt. I, Reel 10, all in CRC Papers. Excerpts from letters in, “Appeal for Wife of Willie McGee,” CRC Press Release, April 18, 1950, Pt. II, Reel, 35; Rosalee McGee, to CRC, May 20, 1949, Pt. I, Reel, 10; Willie McGee, “Uplifted to Know Great American People Have Come to My Rescue,” CRC Press Release, n. d., Pt. I, Reel, 18; Rosalee McGee to Lottie, October 24, 1950, Pt. I, Reel, 10; Willie McGee to CRC, June 20, 1950, Pt. I, Reel 10, all in CRC Papers.

against the CRC's "communist invasion" of Laurel. Although Colmer conceded that the FBI had recently reported that Mississippi had the smallest percentage of communists of any state in the nation, he argued the party hoped to acquire more recruits with the McGee plot. When the National Lawyer's Guild joined the McGee crusade by working on a new appeal, *The Laurel Leader-Call* pointed out that the HUAC had branded the guild a communist front. Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Harvey McGehee publicly declared that the forces working for McGee were using his case as a communist ploy to undermine the citizenry's faith in the American judicial system. Swartzfager condemned one famous McGee supporter, novelist William Faulkner, as an ally of communists after Faulkner proclaimed McGee's innocence, denounced Hawkins as a liar, and accused authorities of framing McGee. When the American Communist Party called on the people to support the McGee crusade, it confirmed the belief of many Mississippi whites that the case indeed represented a communist ploy to destroy America.⁹⁵

On the home front in Mississippi, the white patriarchs employed terror and red-baiting tactics against McGee's defense team and his crusaders. The CRC team, particularly Bella Abzug, became a symbol of all that white Laurel hated—a Jewish, northern, communist woman intervening in a southern racial affair. Often when she visited McGee in jail to discuss the case, lynch mobs formed outside, and men shouted, "Get the commie lawyer, get the lady lawyer, get the Jewish lawyer." One night when

⁹⁵ Quoting William Colmer, "Communitic Tactics," speech, July 31, 1950, the House of Representatives, Congressional Record—Appendix, A5771, clipping in Colmer Papers. "Willie McGee is Turned Down Again by U. S. Supreme Court," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 26, 1951; "McGee to Die March 20 States Court," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 5, 1951; "District Attorney Takes Blast at Willie McGee Supporters," *Laurel Leader Call*, March 28, 1951; "Communists Out in Open Now in McGee Pleas," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 28, 1951.

Abzug arrived in Laurel to work on the case, no hotel would rent her a room, and the threats against her grew so intense that she returned to the bus station where she slept in a stall in the woman's bathroom. She was pregnant at the time, and her husband begged her to come home. But she refused to abandon McGee. In early March 1951, after Governor Wright turned down appeals for clemency by CRC's delegation, locals attacked and brutally beat several members of the delegation, including prominent CRC leader Aubrey Grossman. The xenophobic locals resented "outside interference" and many railed: "Why don't these Communists keep the hell out of here? We can handle our own affairs." Governor Wright, Chief Justice McGehee, and Attorney General John L. Kyle blamed the victims for provoking the attack. The patriarchs also turned their fury on white Mississippians who supported McGee. Since John Poole took on McGee's defense, anonymous callers threatened to murder his family if he refused to drop the case. While he visited his sister's home one night, someone burned a cross in the front yard. Even after Poole resigned from the case to protect his family, no one would conduct business with him and efforts to disbar him continued.⁹⁶

Across the nation, the CRC confronted a difficult battle, for the American landscape had become particularly inhospitable to communists groups. Between 1949 and 1951, China fell to communism under Mao Zedong, the Soviet Union tested an

⁹⁶ First quote, Liz Abzug interview, unedited transcript, Radio Diaries; second and third quotes, "Mississippi Tense at Plea for Negro," *The New York Times*, July 25, 1950, NYT Article Archive. Petition for Stay of Execution, *Mississippi v McGee* (July 25, 1950), and Order for Stay, *McGee v. Mississippi* (July 1950), all in Coleman Papers. "U. S. Judge To Hear McGee's Last Plea," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 26, 1950; "McGee is Snatched from Death Twice," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 28, 1950; Bella Abzug, "Mississippi Bus Station," Jewish Women's Archive, JWA website: <http://jwa.org/exhibits/wov/abzug/bus.html> (accessed September 23, 2009); Donna Mills interview, Radio Diaries; Dan Breland, interview, 174, CRC Papers; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 348-349.

atomic bomb, the Korean conflict erupted into war, and federal authorities indicted Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for selling atomic secrets to the Russians. To explain the allure of global communism, Senator Joe McCarthy accused some 200 government officials of becoming communist sympathizers. Although, out of a population of 150 million, communist membership numbered 43,000 in 1950 and decreased to 35,000 in 1951, McCarthyism convinced most Americans that that Red Menace was rolling across the nation like a plague. Consequently, they supported government efforts to stem the tide.⁹⁷

Worsening matters, the federal government considered the CRC a dangerous communist group. In November 1950, a federal grand jury indicted Patterson for contempt of Congress when he refused to submit a CRC membership list. An FBI agent working undercover in the American Communist Party later argued that the communist affiliations with the McGee case “sealed [McGee’s] doom.” Even State Department officials denigrated the McGee crusade as a Soviet plot to incite hostilities between the United States and Western nations. They branded Philip Morrison, the renowned nuclear physicist who had worked on the atomic bomb, a communist when they learned that he planned to organize the McGee protestors into a permanent peace group. The sensational crusade to save McGee, officials warned, only generated hostilities between the United States and Western nations. As the Mississippi patriarchs hoped, red-baiting proved a useful tactic to deflect federal empathy away from the plight of African Americans. By linking McGee with communism, Mississippi patriarchs turned the unjust conviction into

⁹⁷ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War: Second Edition* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2-25.

a battle against the Reds and burdened McGee with the double jeopardy of belonging to an oppressed race and associating with America's greatest enemy.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, the red-baiting and Patterson's legal struggles failed to deter him or the CRC from boldly taking their white beast narrative to the U. S. Supreme Court. On February 28, 1951, Bella Abzug and John Coe, a Florida civil rights attorney from progressive rather than communist stock, acquired signed affidavits by Willie and Rosalee McGee and Hattie Johnson that introduced the CRC's morality play into the legal record. Armed with the affidavits, McGee's attorneys filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus with the Southern District Court of the United States, and petitioned the Jones County Circuit Court, the Mississippi Supreme Court, and the federal court in Vicksburg for a new hearing. Each denied the request. On March 5, 1951, they appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court. On March 14, Justice Hugo Black heard arguments for a stay of execution in his chambers. While the court deliberated, McGee's supporters launched demonstrations throughout the United States. Though many progressives and communists supported McGee, so too did the masses from varying political persuasions. The NAACP—after years of avoiding the case—finally joined the crusade, requesting that all of its branches write letters to Governor Wright protesting the execution. On March 26, the U. S. Supreme Court dashed the hopes of McGee's crusaders when it ruled against holding a hearing for the case. Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice McGehee lauded

⁹⁸ Quoting "Interest in Negroes Held Red Pretense," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1952, NYT Article Archive; Harold B. Hinton, "Browder, Five Others Indicted in Contempt," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1950, NYT Article Archive. "State Department Telling London About McGee Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 27, 1951.

the decision and declared it “blocked efforts of communist front organizations to threaten the administration of justice in the South.”⁹⁹

Much of the nation and the world responded with outrage. Newspapers across the world printed articles about McGee’s coming execution. Several papers in London along with many English citizens condemned Mississippi for its unequal justice system. The CRC portrayed Rosalee as more determined than ever to save her husband, despite the years of struggle and terror. On April 1, 1951, she addressed a mass meeting at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City where she declared that Mississippi authorities had framed her husband. “I am not only fighting for my husband. I am fighting for freedom and justice for all people. And even if they kill my husband . . . I’m going to keep fighting until my blood runs like water.” Rosalee insisted that Willette Hawkins would one day suffer for her lies. As Rosalee spoke at the church, some 500 protesters assembled in Times Square in New York, wielding signs that demanded, “Stop the lynching of Willie McGee,” and chanting, “Save democracy—free Willie McGee.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Quoting “New Execution Date to Be Set for McGee,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 27, 1951. Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus and Willie McGee’s affidavit, *McGee v. Jones* (February 1951); Hattie Johnson Affidavit; “Willie McGee Plea Heard In Washington,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 15, 1951; Walter White to NAACP Branches, Youth Councils and College Chapters, March 7, 1951, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers; “Demonstration Won Execution Stay for Willie McGee, Crusaders Claim,” *Jackson Daily News*, March 16, 1951; “‘Peace’ Crusaders Celebrate,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 16, 1951; “Willie McGee is Turned Down Again by U. S. Supreme Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 26, 1951. CRC Chapter Bulletin, March 19, 1951, Pt. III, Reel, 2; “Stop Another Legal Lynching,” *CRC Pamphlet*, March 20, 1951, Pt. III, Reel, 8; Open Letter to the President, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel, 7; CRC Press Release, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, all in CRC Papers.

¹⁰⁰ First quote, Rosalee McGee, address at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York City, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers; second quote, “Willie McGee Demonstrat’n in Metropolis,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 2, 1951.

Despite such efforts, the Mississippi Supreme Court set McGee's death date for May 8, 1951. The protests intensified. On May 6 and 7, some 300 supporters marched on Washington D. C. with one group chaining itself to the Lincoln Memorial. Down in Mississippi, 30 protesters, including a delegation of white women, demonstrated outside the state capitol building where McGee's lawyers fought for his clemency. Police arrested the demonstrators. Inside the building, Abzug and Coe met with Governor Wright, Attorney General James P. Coleman, and Mayor Gartin, demanding that the governor grant McGee clemency. In a vitriolic defense of Mississippi, Gartin insisted that the "bestial" McGee was guilty of the "fiendish" rape, and he labeled his lawyers ruthless "communist[s]" who tried to besmirch the reputation of Hawkins, a "helpless victim," with their false allegations of a consensual affair. Gartin declared that such "brazen accusations, conceived in the miasma of some perverted mind are an insult to womanhood and motherhood in general. . . . the filth and foulness of such obscenity is a dastard insult to the name and honor of a Laurel wife and Mother who I know, and all Laurel knows is fine and pure."¹⁰¹

Turned away from the capital, McGee's lawyers filed a civil damage suit charging Mississippi with convicting McGee on perjured testimony. They also petitioned Judge Sidney Mize in federal court for a stay of execution pending the outcome of the civil suit. Finally, they appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court as it had recently ruled in the

¹⁰¹ Quoting "Mayor Carroll Gartin of Laurel Pleads for Justice in McGee Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951. Order for Execution of Willie McGee, *Mississippi v. Willie McGee*, May 3, 1951, McGee case file, [hereinafter cited as Execution Order]; "McGee's Pardon Plea is Taken Under Advisement by Wright," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 5, 1951; "Time Running Out for Negro Willie McGee," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951; "Ask Federal Judge Stay his Execution," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951; "Laurel Victim and Officers are in Jackson," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951. Ann Braden interview, Veterans Hope Project.

Groveland Four interracial rape case in Florida that prejudicial news stories inflamed local passions and prevented the black defendants from receiving a fair trial. Abzug also helped McGee write a telegram to President Truman requesting a pardon. McGee began his statement with a profound observation: “the State of Mississippi will take my life . . . for only one reason. I am a Negro.” Authorities had beaten him and subjected him to “intense inquisition” on multiple occasions in violation of his constitutional rights and planned to kill him because of his affair with a white woman. McGee emphasized that the President’s Committee on Civil Rights found that whites used lynching as a terror tactic to sustain the white supremacist order, and he argued that rigged trials became the new forum for lynching. McGee also stressed the importance of his case on the international stage. Secretary of State Dean Acheson had admitted that America’s mistreatment of its minorities generated bad publicity for the nation during World War II. After the war, America agreed to protect the civil rights of all its citizens when it submitted to the United Nations Charter, Article 55 which protects universal human rights regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. McGee cautioned that: “we dare not preach freedom abroad and tolerate its absence at home.” Then, he begged the President to save his life, for he was an innocent man.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Quoting Willie McGee to President Harry Truman, May 7, 1951, Pt. I, Reel, 10, CRC Papers. “M’Gee Executed As Last Minute Appeals Denied,” *Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1951; “Ask Federal Judge Stay his Execution,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951; “Laurel Victim and Officers are in Jackson,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1951; Lawson, Colburn, Paulson, “Groveland: Florida’s Little Scottsboro,” 16-17. John N. Popham, “4th M’Gee Appeal to High Court,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1951; “Negroes Conviction is Upset,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 1951, both in NYT Article Archive. Article 55, Chapter IX, Charter of the United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter9.shtml>

All efforts to save McGee failed. Judge Mize rejected the petition; the U. S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case; Governor Wright refused to grant him clemency; and President Truman neglected to intervene. In the end, the leaders and justices in the federal arena understood that if they intervened in the McGee case, they must attack Jim Crow justice and launch a reform of the entire southern judicial system. The effort would require the U. S. Supreme Court to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment as incorporating most of the first eight amendments and thus prohibited states from infringing upon a person's right to equal justice. It would oblige congress to pass a series of civil rights bills to protect blacks from discrimination, particularly because at the turn of the century, the U. S. Supreme Court had weakened civil rights bills and restricted the reach of the Fourteenth Amendment. Finally, it would compel President Truman to use the power of federal investigative and policing bodies to enforce court orders and federal legislation. In 1951, although the three branches of the federal government had begun to address some issues of racial exclusion and discrimination, none were prepared for the total assault on white supremacy required to dismantle Jim Crow.¹⁰³

On the night of May 7, 1951, Mississippi authorities assembled the portable electric chair inside the second story courtroom where Judge Collins had twice sentenced McGee to death. Hundreds, perhaps a thousand, whites flocked outside the courthouse, anxious to catch a glimpse of the killing. The weather was pleasant, and the vigil became a social event. Townspeople and reporters milled about, visiting with each other. WAML and WFOR radio broadcasters Jack Dick and Granville Walters set up camp among the

¹⁰³ "McGee Dies In Chair," *Hattiesburg American*, May 8, 1951; Execution Order, McGee case file; Craig Zaim, "Trial by Ordeal," 215-247, particularly, 227-230, 235- 238, 247; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 316-319.

crowd to broadcast the spectacle live. When District Attorney Swartzfager arrived half-drunk, he asked the sheriff to let him see McGee alone. Once inside his cell, he pulled a bottle of bourbon from inside his coat and handed it to McGee. He thought perhaps the alcohol would calm McGee's fears, but he came for something else. He had to find out if McGee was guilty or if he was sending an innocent man to his death. When he asked McGee if he had sex with Hawkins, McGee raised his eyes and fixed them on Swartzfager, "Yes sir, but she wanted it as much as I did." After Swartzfager left him, McGee spent his final moments with Reverend T. W. Patterson—the only black person who had dared to testify on his behalf. McGee smoked a cigar and listened as Patterson read the 23rd Psalm.¹⁰⁴

As midnight neared, guards led McGee across the catwalk connecting the jailhouse to the courtroom. Down below, Jack Dick compared the image of McGee's final walk to the circus masters bringing lions from their cages to the arena. As the clock approached midnight, Walters stated, "Time is rapidly running out for Willie McGee." Finally, news came down from the courthouse that McGee had entered the courtroom and seemed terrified. County Attorney E. K. Collins, wearing a bowtie and a sharp looking suit, moved to the window and looked down at the crowd. A boy began climbing higher into the branches of the tree, hoping to witness the killing. Dick noted with excitement: "I say it looks like he's going to see it. He's up there in that tree looking in the window." Inside the courtroom, 100 witnesses gathered to watch the execution, including Troy

¹⁰⁴ Quoting "Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair," Radio Diaries. Jon Odell, "Prosecuting Willie McGee, Part 2" *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author's possession; "McGee Dies In Chair," *Hattiesburg American*, May 8, 1951; CRC News Release, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers; Jack Dick and Granville Walters, Radio Broadcast, WAML and WAFL, May 7-8, 1951, recording, MOHP, [hereinafter cited as Dick & Walters Radio Broadcast].

Hawkins. Willette was conspicuously absent. As McGee entered the room flanked by guards and Reverend Patterson, he calmly told the minister, “I am ready to go.” Then he froze, and a guard propelled him forward by tugging on his belt. McGee locked eyes with Patterson. The executioner strapped McGee to the chair, secured the metal electrode skull cap to his head, and fastened a leather band over his eyes.¹⁰⁵

At 12:05 a.m., the executioner sent a bolt of electricity through McGee’s body. McGee clenched his fists, but he did not scream or fight his constraints as the 2,500 volts coursed through him. The massive generator supplying the electricity to the chair roared like waves of thunder. The streetlights dimmed. Over the rumble, the crowd started cheering. At 12:08 a.m., the executioner turned off the switch. McGee’s head slumped back against the chair. His mouth fell open. When authorities removed the mask, “a single tear clung to his right eye a moment or two before it trickled down his drawn face.” Outside, reporters raced to nearby pay phones. The crowd milled toward the courthouse waiting for official notice. Dick reported, “Certainly it is a scene that nobody likes to see—the execution of any human being. But when it becomes necessary it must be done . . . still no one comes to shut off this generator. It continues to rumble down here beneath us.” After a few moments, a man appeared on the courthouse balcony and shouted: “He’s dead. Willie McGee is dead.” The crowd roared with joy. Granville ended the broadcast by simply stating, “Willie McGee has finally paid for the crime he

¹⁰⁵ First and second quotes, Dick & Walters Radio Broadcast; last quote, CRC News Release, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers. “McGee Dies In Chair,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 8, 1951; “Willie McGee Pays With Life For Crime Over Five Years Ago After Final Appeals Fail,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 8, 1951, Willie McGee Trials, Crime-Violent Vertical File LRM; Jonathan Odell, “Raymond Horne: Witness to an Execution, Part I,” *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author’s possession.

committed here in Laurel a number of years ago.” Inside the courthouse, black undertakers collected McGee, wrapped him in a sheet, transported him down the stairs, and into the crowd. Rebel yells coursed through the night air as the hearse carrying McGee’s body drove past the mob.¹⁰⁶

In Harlem, they cried. The thousands of men, women, and children, who had gathered for an all night vigil, mourned for the man they believed innocent and for whom they had fought so hard, but failed to save. They refused to slide into helpless apathy. Rather, they voiced their determination to terminate white supremacist terror. In an emotional oath, they declared that they would direct their efforts at destroying the “lynch system that killed McGee.” They would organize in churches, in their places of employment, in their social and professional groups in the struggle to eradicate Jim Crow. McGee’s final words, in a letter he left behind for Rosalee, the woman he called his wife in his final years of life, galvanized their spirit. He beseeched Rosalee, “if I have to die I want you to say goodbye to my mother and the children and all the people who no it is wrong to kill a man because of his color. You no I am innocent. tell the people again and again I never did commit this crime. tell them the real reason they are going to take my life is to Keep the Negro down in the south. they cant do this if you and the children

¹⁰⁶ First quote, “Mississippi Whites Roar Approval As Willie McGee Dies in Chair,” *Chicago Defender*, May 19, 1951; third quote, Ann Sanders interview, Radio Diaries; all other quotes, Dick and Walters Radio Broadcast. CRC News Release, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers; “Mississippi Has Her ‘Finest Hour,’” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 19, 1951; Death Certificate of Willie McGee, May 8, 1951, McGee case file.

keep on fighting. never forget to tell them why they killed their Daddy. I no you won't fail me. tell the people to keep on fighting."¹⁰⁷

In the aftermath, Mississippi whites praised the execution of a brutal rapist in the face of liberal lies and communist hysteria, while blacks screamed with outrage over the state sanctioned lynching of an innocent black man. *The Laurel Leader-Call* lauded court officials for defeating the propaganda and legal delays to deliver “justice of which we, as a people, are proud.” The most popular American publications such as *Life* and *Time* considered McGee guilty and castigated his supporters as self-serving communists who used the case to exacerbate racial tensions and damage America’s international reputation. Conversely, *The Pittsburgh Courier* sardonically called the killing “Mississippi’s finest hour,” as its white supremacist system triumphed over one of the greatest legal battles ever waged to save the life of a black man falsely condemned in a racist system. Devastated by McGee’s death, Patterson castigated the “legal lynching,” as the replacement for “magnolia tree hangings.” He chastised southern white Jezebels for having “their black men and wantonly spill[ing their] blood when the whim arises.” “The President, governors, and judges” perpetuated “the ruthless terror” to maintain “jim crow, and segregation,” and so McGee’s “blood” ran down their hands, too. Patterson concluded that though white America’s conscience had begun to awaken, “the lessons of

¹⁰⁷ First quote, CRC News Release, n. d., Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 7, NAACP Papers; second quote, “Mississippi Has Her ‘Finest Hour,’ ” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 19, 1951; all other quotes, Willie McGee, to Rosalee, n. d., Robert F. Hall Papers, New York State Library, Albany, New York.

anti-Semitism in Germany have not yet been learned in America. That is why McGee is dead.”¹⁰⁸

While McGee’s body lay at a local black funeral home in Laurel, some black teachers and parents marched their students and children to the casket to view the corpse so that they would fear whites. Harvey Warren, six-years-old at the time, stood staring at the corpse as his father told him, “You do not get connected with white girls. You see what happened to Willie McGee.” After his execution, blacks buried McGee in an unmarked grave, and few Laurel residents, white or black, ever spoke of him again. The story vanished from the newspapers in Laurel. According to reporter Raymond Horne, “the city had suffered. We’re glad it’s over. Let’s forget it.” For many years, the racial divide in Laurel grew more rigid, and the hostility harsher as though the horrors of the McGee saga haunted the town. And the patriarchs remained determined to destroy John Poole for his ardent defense of McGee. They managed to disbar him on dubious charges of embezzling funds from an estate case. He left Mississippi for a year, but eventually, in 1956, with the help of friends and friendly Jackson lawyers, the bar reinstated him, and he had a long successful career.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ First quote, “A Clean Sheet,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 8, 1951, Willie McGee Trials, Violent-Crime Vertical File, LRM; second quote, “Mississippi Has Her Finest Hour,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 19, 1951; all other quotes, “Avenge His Murder,” *CRC Chapter Bulletin*, May 14, 1951, Pt. II, Reel 2, CRC Papers. “Mississippi Justice and the Communists,” *Time Magazine*, May 14, 1951, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,935215,00.html>; “The End of Willie McGee,” *Life Magazine*, May 21, 1944, 44.

¹⁰⁹ First quote, “Willie McGee and the Traveling Electric Chair” Radio Diaries; second quote, Raymond Horne interview, Radio Diaries. Donna Mills interview, Radio Diaries; Dan Breland, interview, 174, CRC Papers; Jonathan Odell, “Mrs. Elin Andrews: Viewing the Body of Willie McGee,” *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author’s possession; Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 348-349.

Willette Hawkins also spent years trying to repair her reputation. In July 1951, through the law offices of future Mississippi governor Ross Barnett, Willette and Troy Hawkins filed a \$1,000,000 defamation suit against the communist newspaper *Daily Worker* on the grounds that it had slandered Willette's character and ruined her name by claiming that she "suddenly shouted rape" when caught in her "illicit affair" with McGee. In 1955, The *Daily Worker* settled the suit with Hawkins for \$5,000 and promised to print retractions that conceded it had not proved its allegations against her. The settlement failed to validate Hawkins' story, however, as the money was a pittance of her asking price. Furthermore, the inability of the paper's private investigator to locate witnesses willing to attest to the affair was not surprising. During the McGee saga when McGee's life was in jeopardy, only one black man had dared to testify that McGee could never receive a fair trial in the violent white supremacist environment in Jones County. Nor is it surprising that Hawkins never changed her story or that she sued the newspaper. If she actually admitted to having an affair, she surely would have never recovered her reputation and would have admitted to committing a felony.¹¹⁰

Neither the money nor the retraction quieted the ghosts. Hawkins grew reclusive. To numb the pain, she drank bourbon and smoked, but still her nightmares and migraines continued. Reporter Ann Sanders and Hawkins' children believed Willette's mind broke over the horror of the rape. Others knew that since she had lied about the rape, she suffered because she could not forget what she had done. The man who ultimately sent McGee to his death could not forget either. Every year as the anniversary of the execution

¹¹⁰ First and second quotes, "Daily Worker Suit Settled for \$5,000," *New York Times*, May 6, 1955, 31, NYT Article Archive. "Mrs. Hawkins Enters Suit For a Million," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 3, 1951, Willie McGee Trial, Crimes—Violent Vertical File, LRM.

approached, the Swartzfager home grew somber. Each May, Paul Swartzfager fell into a deep depression, refused to rise from his bed, or leave the house. His “despair” engulfed the family. Hundreds of miles away in Nevada, McGee’s family lived in despair, too. The sorrow turned to rage for Willie Earl who could never “heal” or “forgive.” He spent most of his adult life in prison, and decades later when his grandniece asked him the story of his father, he broke into sobs and could not speak. Years after the execution, the suffering of the McGees continued. In separate crimes, Eliza was stabbed to death, and Gracie was shot to death. On March 25, 1967, Troy and Willette Hawkins perished in an automobile accident. McGee’s granddaughter, Bridgette McGee-Robinson, considered the suffering of all these families a “curse” from the “unjustified” execution so many years before.¹¹¹

The McGee saga proved one of Mississippi’s greatest tragedies. Perhaps nothing could have saved McGee in those perilous times. Still, the CRC leaders made two significant mistakes. First, they failed to understand that in 1951, red-baiting trumped Nazi-baiting. After all, Hitler was dead, the Nazis defeated, and communists were the most feared American enemies. Second, the CRC divested McGee of the masculinity he so coveted and reduced McGee into a caricature to the point that his story lacked believability. McGee was not the brute of the black beast mythology, but neither was he the hapless victim of the white beast morality play. He was not even the paragon of virtue represented by Tom Robinson in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but he was innocent of rape. He endured the horrifying injustices committed against him and

¹¹¹ First quote, Jon Swartzfager interview, Radio Diaries; all other quotes, Bridgette McGee-Robinson, narration, Radio Diaries. Ann Sanders, interview, Radio Diaries. Jonathan Odell, “Anne Sanders: Search for the Truth about Willie McGee,” *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author’s possession; and Heard, *Through the Eyes of Willie McGee*, 22, 112-113.

transformed his suffering into a fight against his oppressors that inspired the world. The full narrative of McGee's life delivers neither a villain nor a victim, but rather a man, who in his darkest hour, served as a soldier in the struggle for racial justice. In that sense, he became Mississippi's mockingbird.¹¹²

In 1951, it appeared to far too many blacks across the Central Piney Woods that their mockingbird had died in vain. NAACP leader Ruby Hurley, who made a tour of Mississippi in May 1953, reported "the minds of Negroes [in Mississippi] are completely enslaved; they move the way they think the white man wants them to move." Many Mississippi blacks viewed the NAACP with suspicion as they believed white supremacist propaganda that it was a communist inspired organization. Besides, like the CRC, it lacked the ability to save Willie McGee. With the McGee execution, the Knight conviction, the Bilbo exoneration, and the destruction of Operation Dixie, the white patriarchs obliterated racial heresies. They staved off federal intervention by using the Cold War imperative to tie all civil rights activities to communism. Nevertheless, the brutal wrath of the white supremacist Leviathan exposed the breadth of southern despotism surviving in a nation that prided itself as a beacon of liberty to the world. The Cold War imperative, so adeptly used by the white supremacists to destroy black activism and white leftists was a sword with two edges. After McGee's execution, the federal government became increasingly aware of the problems racial oppression posed to

¹¹² Jonathan Odell, "Anne Sanders: Search for the Truth about Willie McGee, Column Part 2," *The City Beautiful*, series for *Laurel Leader-Call*, 2008, copy in author's possession. "No Compromise with Segregation or Discrimination," Annual Report from the NAACP Southeast Regional Conference, 1953; Report by Ruby Hurley, May 7, 1951; Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, May 5, 1952, all in Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 5, NAACP Papers. Maycie Gore interview; Johnny Magee interview, Larry McGill, interview. See too Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

America's Cold War dominance. Nations across the globe condemned the execution. Senator Richard Nixon, while running for vice president on the Republican ticket in 1951, pointed out that the legal lynching of McGee had harmed America's international reputation. Nixon insisted that America must strengthen its resolve against racial injustice because "we can still lose the struggle with worldwide communism for men's minds, hearts and souls." In the ensuing decades, bloody conflicts over decolonization and the Cold War fight for ideological domination internationalized the race problem, particularly when the global superpowers struggled to establish alliances with people of color.¹¹³

Perhaps most importantly, beneath the surface of the seemingly defeated black struggle in the Central Piney Woods beat the heart of black protest. The McGee case, along with several other contemporary interracial rape cases in other southern states, taught the national NAACP that the federal government was not prepared to attack the sexual color line that undergirded Jim Crow. Consequently, the NAACP focused its future battles on public integration and black suffrage rather than on the delicate topic of private segregation. During 1953 the NAACP grew in the state, and black hope and expectation rose.¹¹⁴ Although black activists in the Central Piney Wood failed to achieve

¹¹³ First quote, Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, May 27, 1953, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 5, NAACP Papers; second quote, Charles Grutzner, "Truman Attacked by Nixon on Bias," *The New York Times*, October 20, 1952, NYT Article Archive. Charles Grutzner, "Execution of M'Gee Protested in Paris," *New York Times*, May 9, 1951, NYT Article Archive. For the impact of the Cold War on racial struggles in general, see Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope* and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁴ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 9; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, 3rd ed., 1974), 131-140; "No

any victories during these years, they managed to continue the awakening of the world's conscience to the horrors of racism in their counties. The NAACP branches in Jones and Forrest counties survived the onslaught of the white backlash, and they continued to recruit blacks to their ranks, albeit slowly. Over the next decade, the revolutionary spirit burgeoned to life in the underground channels. Whites could neither stem the tide of national changes rolling toward them nor contain the rising currents of protest emerging from within their borders. Although whites would murder many more blacks before the white tyranny collapsed, Mississippi blacks turned their mockingbirds into martyrs as they prepared to launch a Movement that ensured that not one of them died in vain.

CHAPTER IV:
REFORMATION: PRELUDE TO THE MOVEMENT

The angry white men gathered in a room. One man suggested that he could make it look like a railroad accident—the Negro tried to run the tracks, but the train came too fast. Another convinced the rest that they should frame the Negro for a felony and send him to prison instead. Perhaps he opposed murder, or maybe he just worried that the killing might not proceed as planned and would attract federal attention. Going to prison for conspiring to kill someone—even if it was just a “nigger”—did not appeal to them. They would have no regrets. They had worked hard to turn the Normal School into Mississippi Southern College, a respectable institution that attracted commercial wealth to Hattiesburg. They would not watch it collapse because some colored boy wanted an education. Besides, they had warned him. He knew the dangers. He just refused to capitulate. Strangely, he seemed unafraid.¹

The white men had no understanding of Clyde Kennard. To them, he was just another troublemaking Negro, a heretic to the racial order, whom they wanted to put down, but settled for putting away. Conversely, among blacks, Kennard was a hero, a twentieth-century black philosophe who helped launch a racial reformation by fighting white tyranny with the reason of the black enlightenment. But they feared for him. Two years earlier, the University of Mississippi had derailed efforts by NAACP leader Medgar

¹ Ronald A. Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White: The Story of Clyde Kennard,” n. d., Pt. IV, Reel, 7, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SNCC Papers]. Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, Sovereignty Commission Record #1-27-0-40-1-1-1, 3-6, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR, MDAH]; Van Landingham to Director, May 4, 1959, SCR #5-3-1-19-1-1-1, MDAH.

Evers to desegregate the university by disqualifying him on an application technicality. Afterward, Evers became a target of dangerous white men. No black person had dared to seek admission to Mississippi Southern College (MSC) before 1955 when Kennard requested an application. To Kennard, segregation was as illogical as it was evil. MSC was a state supported college. His tax dollars funded it. When a close friend warned him that whites might kill him, he responded: "History is in the making. It's an interesting time to live, and not such a bad time to die." He had no idea yet the suffering he would know before they let him die.²

Between 1954 and 1963, Kennard stood at the forefront of the struggle that led to a racial reformation in the Central Piney Woods, but he did not stand alone. He rose to prominence in the Forrest County NAACP, an underground branch that included Vernon Dahmer. The revolutionary spirit was growing stronger in Jones County too as a dentist, Benjamin Murph, led the vanguard of blacks in the Laurel-Jones County branch of the NAACP. These reformers engaged in acts considered bold in Mississippi, such as trying to register to vote, pressuring the federal government to bring voting discrimination suits against local registrars, and testifying about racial oppression before the Civil Rights Commission. Their work eventually drew into the Central Piney Woods the more aggressive national civil rights organizations, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO), which revolutionized the indigenous struggle. These black reformers also found

² Quoting Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 279; *Ibid.*, 278; Report by Zack J. Van Landingham, December 17, 1958, SCR # 1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1-1, 6-11, MDAH. For Medgar Evers, see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 49, 446n.

a few white allies of progressive stock, who dared to raise their voices against white supremacy. To denounce racial oppression, P. D. East, a local newspaper owner, used his satirical writing skills, and the Rabbi Charles Mantinband his pulpit. On the witness stand, before Congress, and from pulpits, newspapers, and podiums, these black and white reformers articulated a powerful thesis for black liberation and racial equality. They blended the Judeo-Christian principles of brotherhood and social justice with the Enlightenment tenets of democracy and merit to expose the absurdity of the white supremacist ideology and the parasitic affects of a tyrannical and divided society. They launched their racial reformation by attacking three powerful pillars of white tyranny: segregation, black disfranchisement, and racial injustice.³

The federal government played a significant role in the reformation, too. On May 17, 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U. S. Supreme Court justices sided with Thurgood Marshall and his NAACP legal team when they unanimously declared segregation in education a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and therefore unconstitutional. The ruling had far reaching implications, as whites had largely sustained Jim Crow by segregating children. *Brown* was the most pervasive systematic assault upon the southern racial order, and it threatened to permeate every aspect of southern life until it destroyed Jim Crow forever. The NAACP proclaimed the decision a watershed in the struggle for black equality. Many historians

³ Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 277-287; Clive Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town: Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg, Mississippi," in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights 1880s-1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkeley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press: 1997), 215-217; Allen Kreuse, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," unpublished manuscript, 154-155, Rabbi Charles Mantinband Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Mantiband Papers; McCain Library and Archives, hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]; P. D. East, *Magnolia Jungle* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1960).

classify *Brown* as the turning point because it provided a legal foundation from which civil rights leaders could attack Jim Crow, and it initiated the first phase of the Civil Rights Movement—an 11 year struggle centered on three major goals: integration, suffrage, and racial justice. During this era, blacks fought for equality on all levels of society, but the battles for enfranchisement, integration, and justice drove the Movement. The struggle proved perilous as white supremacists fiercely protected their white tyranny by spawning the Massive Resistance Movement—a counterreformation against federal intervention and a crackdown against the rising Civil Rights Movement.

In Mississippi, massive resistance proved so comprehensive, pervasive, and violent that the civil rights activists began the Mississippi struggle as an intellectual awakening. First, they tried to expose the dichotomy between American democracy and racial tyranny with powerful Lockean and Jeffersonian rhetoric in their writings to stir the conscience of the nation, inspire federal intervention, and to recruit more locals to the struggle. Next, they initiated federal lawsuits against black disfranchisement and dared to testify in Washington D. C. in favor of federal civil rights legislation. Finally, they spread their revolutionary underground across the state, they launched sporadic attacks against Jim Crow, and one man even dared to attack segregation. Their reformation contributed to the awakening of the nation, and it galvanized locals to join the struggle and prepare the ground for a black revolution. However, during this dangerous decade, the white ruling class prevented even token desegregation of the schools, and thwarted the rise of a full-scale Civil Rights Movement in any region in the state until 1959, and in the Central Piney Woods, until 1964.⁴

⁴ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954). For NAACP response, see *The Year of the Great Decision, NAACP Annual Report, 1954*, 1, William

The white patriarchs launched their counterreformation with a two-pronged approach: they used massive resistance to wear down the federal government until it tired of the conflict and abandoned southern blacks as it had during Reconstruction, and they used their police state to suppress black activism. They mobilized propaganda machines and incited white rage with fear mongering as they warned that *Brown* established a precedent for a national dictatorship. They framed their legal argument around the First Amendment right to freedom of association and around the notion of state sovereignty over schools. On the national level, Representative William Colmer, Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator John Stennis joined their southern brethren in Congress by signing the “Southern Manifesto,” which declared the *Brown* decision unconstitutional, and they resurrected the ideology of interposition—the interposing of state sovereignty between the federal government and local school boards to prevent desegregation. At the same time, Governor Hugh White and the legislature spearheaded and passed an amendment

D. Colmer Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Colmer Papers]. For overview of the impact of the *Brown* ruling on the civil rights struggle and on massive resistance see, Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 396-424; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, 3rd. ed.1974),146-147; Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region At Odds* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995); Michael J. Klarman, “How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” *The Journal of American History*, 81 (June 1994): 117-118. For civil rights goals, see Dittmer, *Local People*, 41; For Mississippi in particular, see, Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson, Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 61-116; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 29-301; Dittmer, *Local People*, 41-214; Aaron Henry with Constance Baker, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 78-161.

allowing the governor to close public schools and universities if forced to integrate them. Attorney General James P. Coleman retained some 1,000 attorneys who agreed to work pro bono on desegregation cases. To quash the burgeoning Movement, the patriarchs established the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, an intelligence agency that spied on activists and provided political leaders, law enforcement, and white supremacist groups with information on dissidents. Ordinary citizens reacted as well. They formed White Citizens Councils in nearly every county. The councils often conspired with state and local governments, the commission, law enforcement, and the courts to suppress the black struggle through economic reprisals, harassment, false prosecutions, and sometimes violence. A member of the White Citizens' Council expressed the attitude of his brethren when he publicly declared, "a few killings at this time would save much time later."⁵

White Mississippians answered the call to arms against *Brown* with so much violence that the NAACP distributed a pamphlet entitled "M is For Mississippi and Murder." After five years without an extralegal lynching in Mississippi, in 1955 whites killed two black men for trying to vote; they murdered another for overfilling his fuel tank; and they tried to slay the co-founder of the Belzoni NAACP chapter. The state

⁵ Quoting "M is for Mississippi and Murder," pamphlet, 1956, Pt. 20, Reel 2, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]. Proposed Amendment and Speech by Governor Hugh White to Mississippi Legislature, September 8, 1954, *Mississippi Senate Journal, Extraordinary Session, 1954-1955*, 3-4, 8-10. William Colmer, "School Segregation," *Congressional Sidelights*, May 26, 1954, and "Declaration of Constitutional Principles," (Southern Manifesto), House of Representatives, March 12, 1956, 4003-4004, both in Colmer Papers. James O. Eastland, "The Supreme Court, Segregation, and the South" Senate of the United States, May 27, 1954, 3-6, 13, James O. Eastland Folder, Kenneth Toller Papers, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Toller Papers; and collections at Mitchell Memorial Library cited as Mitchell, MSU]; "Mississippi," Pt. 3, Ser. C, Reel 1, NAACP Papers. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 15-40; Bartley, *Massive Resistance*, 116-122, 127-128; Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 68-69.

failed to punish any of the murderers. The most shocking racial killing occurred in the Delta on August 28, when two white men shot 14-year-old Emmett Till in the head and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River. Till had allegedly flirted with a white woman. On September 23, an all-white jury took 67 minutes to acquit the defendants. The federal government failed to intervene, and its apathy in the wake of the murders left blacks powerless and strengthened the white counterreformation. As Iola Williams, a black Hattiesburg teenager asked rhetorically, “What can you do . . . when there’s no justice?”⁶

Faith to white supremacy was pervasive, but not absolute. Every region of the state had white progressives who opposed racial oppression; and it had many white moderates who supported white supremacy while also championing black uplift and disdaining violence. Still, only a smattering of progressives and moderates dared to condemn racial violence publicly. Four students at Mississippi Southern College (MSC)

⁶ First quote NAACP, “M is for Mississippi and Murder,” pamphlet; second quote, Iola Williams, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), November 6, 2006, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, Center for Oral History and Cultural Archives, USM, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. *The Year of the Great Decision, NAACP Annual Report, 1954*, 1-5; Mr. Current to Mr. Wilkins, December 13, 1954, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 14; “NAACP Appeals to President to Halt Mississippi Terror,” Press Release, December 22, 1954, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 13; Roy Wilkins to United States Department of Justice, September 7, 1955, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 13; Mr. Current to Mr. Moon, December 1, 1955, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 12; “We Add Our Voice To Call For Federal Action in Mississippi,” pamphlet, n. d. Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 13, all in NAACP Papers. “Progress and Reaction 1955,” NAACP Annual Report, 7, Colmer Papers; The National Lists: Places of Death, *The Lynching Century: African Americans Who Died in Racial Violence in the United States*, <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Base/8507/NLPlaces1.htm>; Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 15-17, 42-47; Joyce A. Ladner, “Voices Outside the Story,” in *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement* (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publishers, n. d.), 311-313, in Joyce Ladner, Tougaloo Collection, MDAH.

raised their voices in protest against the killing of Emmett Till, if only anonymously, in a poem they sent to the *Hattiesburg American* that declared: “When Christians say/ Thou shalt not kill/ They do not think/ Of Emmet Till.” Some of the most eloquent protests against massive resistance emerged from editors and owners of newspapers, such as Hazel Brannon Smith in Lexington and Hodding Carter in Greenville. Both major newspapers in the Central Piney Woods, the *Hattiesburg American* and the *Laurel Leader-Call*, were segregationist sheets, but both also dared to oppose racial violence. The *Hattiesburg American* even occasionally printed moderate and progressive perspectives, such as the poem from the anonymous MSC students. Moreover, a little newspaper from Petal, a suburb of Hattiesburg, evolved into a fierce critic of segregation. The owner and editor, P. D. East, a son of the segregated lumber camps in Forrest County, rejected the southern mores of his society and became a self-deprecating rebel, who used satire to show his brethren the error of their ways. His newspaper quickly lost favor once subscribers figured out, as East put it, that he was “something of an activist.” As the circulation fell from 2,300 to the “lowest local per capita circulation of any in the world . . . zero,” East quipped, “the trouble all started” when he read the Constitution of the United States, which corrupted his mind, and forced him to arrive at the shocking realization that “Negroes were, after all, just people.”⁷

East launched his initial foray against massive resistance in November 1955 when

⁷ First quote, Anonymous, untitled poem, in Anna Kest Mantinband, “Time for Remembering,” (1979), 74, Mantinband Papers; all other quotes, P. D. East, “On the Attainment of Distinction,” Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, December 1962, 5, P. D. East Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as East Collection]. Editorials & Articles, 1951-1961, Hazel Brannon Smith Papers, Mitchell, MSU. Hodding Carter, “What Next Four Our Schools?” *The Delta Democrat-Times*, August 22, 1954; Hodding Carter, “The Court’s Decision,” *The Delta Democrat-Times*, May 18, 1954, both in Colmer Papers.

he lambasted the state amendment allowing the governor to close public schools to avoid integration. He lost his biggest advertizing account. Still, he persisted. Attempting to appeal to the Bible-Belt conscience, he contemplated the racial arrangement in heaven: “Do they have another Heaven for [the Negro]? Or possibly just a section of Heaven set aside for the Negro’s quarters? Are the streets in the Negro quarters paved with gold, too? Do they give him milk and honey, or does he stay too busy mopping the gold streets that run in front of the white area?” Perhaps, he ruminated, God forbade segregation in heaven. In that case, he warned his fellow citizens, “it’s likely to be thumbs down just when we tell St. Peter we’re from Mississippi.” East further inflamed southern nerves when he mocked censorship. The southern race problem all began, he noted caustically, when whites “allowed the Negro[es] to read,” for the great classics taught them that the desire for liberty was a natural one and a right of all humans. In one classic, the United States Constitution, blacks found the tools to demand their civil rights and liberties.⁸

White supremacists certainly feared that access to critiques of Jim Crow could inspire blacks and elicit white empathy. To prevent such a development in Jones County, District Attorney General Grover Doggette and County Prosecutor Leonard Melvin, Jr. led the grand jury in a probe of elementary school library books that promoted integration. The grand jury called for an immediate prohibition of all such literature. County School Superintendent Bernard Powall promised to launch a screening process of libraries in the 41 schools. Authorities failed, however, to prevent the spread of subversive materials by the local NAACP branches. Members like Dr. P. R. McLeod of

⁸ First and second quotes, P. D. East, “At the Gate, One Keeper . . . Two Gates?” *Petal Paper*, February 9, 1956; P. D. East, *Editorial Reprints from the Petal Paper*, East Collection, McCain, USM; third quote, P. D. East, “A Letter to A Friend,” *Petal Paper*, February 16, 1956; P. D. East, “Freedom of the Press and the Mighty Buck, An Editorial,” *Petal Paper*, July 14, 1955.

Forrest County, distributed black magazines, such as *Jet* and *Ebony*, and newspapers, including *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Chicago Defender* throughout the black community. The materials revolutionized the minds of children like Joyce and Dorie Ladner. For Joyce, “it was like bringing information into a wilderness. It showed what we could not have access to in our own state.” Over the next decade, the Ladner sisters, under the tutelage of the NAACP leaders like Dahmer and Kennard, devoted their lives to the struggle. During these years, the NAACP, however, had to operate in secret, particularly with the rise of massive resistance organizations like the White Citizens Councils.⁹

The White Citizens Council became one of the most powerful enforcers of racial control in Mississippi. By the close of 1956, every congressional district had at least one council and membership reached 80,000 across the state. Under the guidance of two lawyers, Earl Wingo and Dudley Connor, Forrest County established its council that March. Wingo had a history of mistreatment of blacks. He defended the lynchers of Howard Wash, and he swindled Willie McGee’s mother out of her savings when he falsely promised to defend McGee. At least one constable, Lee Daniels, along with the then current and future circuit clerks, Luther Cox and Theron Lynd, became members. The *Hattiesburg American* encouraged the citizenry to join by announcing its first meeting on the front page. P. D. East also announced the council’s formation, but in a parody that ridiculed the group. His full-page advertisement featured a donkey singing, “Suh . . . Join the Glorious Citizens Clan Next Thursday Night! . . . BE SAFE FROM

⁹ Quoting Hudson-Weems, *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement*, 313. Ibid., 312; Joyce Ladner, interview by Peggy Klekotka, March 11, 1991, Joyce Ladner, Tougaloo Collection, MDAH. McLeod’s name is sometimes spelled McCloud in accounts of his work in the NAACP. “Grand Jury Calls for Purge of Pro-Integration Books,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 1956.

SOCIAL WORRIES. BE SUPER-SUPERIOR.” With great sarcasm, he listed a series of freedoms the Citizens Council offered: the liberty to interpret the U. S. Constitution as one desired, to shout “Nigger” without guilt, to “hunt ‘Blackbirds’ with no bag limit, and without fear of prosecution!” The next day, East received numerous phone calls from whites who castigated him as a “nigger-loving, Jew-loving, Communist son-of-a-bitch.” Days later, while East waited at a traffic light, a white man rushed toward his vehicle and shouted: “You no-good bastard, if you’ll get out of that car I’ll mop up the street with you.” East responded: “You’ll have to offer me more inducement than that.” East’s humor helped him endure attacks, but he grew increasingly frightened. He feared most those persons who would never waste time with idle threats.¹⁰

East’s criticisms notwithstanding, over 100 white residents attended the first local council meeting held inside the circuit courtroom at the Forrest County courthouse. Wingo began with typical fear mongering, when he asked, “Who is naïve enough to believe [the NAACP] would stop with integration in the schools? They wish to do away with all laws related to segregation, even those barring marriage between the races.” He also red-baited the NAACP as a “contemptible communist outfit” engaged in a plot to “divide [the nation] with racial squabbles and conquer it.” The council, Wingo pledged, would preempt such efforts in Forrest County. His diatribe resonated with many attendees, half of whom filled out membership cards. Connor became the president of the Forrest County council and helped organize and chair the council’s sixth congressional

¹⁰ First, second, and third quotes, White Citizen Council Advertisement, *The Petal Paper*, March 5, 1956; fourth quote, East, *Magnolia Jungle*, 180; *Ibid.*, 175-181; fifth quote, East “On the Attainment of Distinction,” 11; McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council*, 15-21; 161-187; 207-230; 237-251; 268-269; “Citizens Council Will Elect Officers April 3,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1956.

district, which included Forrest, Jones, and six other counties.¹¹

As the Citizens Council grew in Forrest County, it became East's favorite whipping boy. That fall, East declared that the *Petal Paper* wished to express its views on the positive influence the Citizens Council had on Mississippi. Beneath these words lay a completely blank page. He devoted his "East Side" column to critiques of the council where he noted that members had created a mob mentality and used fear to silence criticism. East warned whites about the slippery slope of hatred, noting that although the local council invited Jews to join, in Alabama, the Klan had declared them enemies. For East's grave transgressions of southern racial mores, he suffered financial ruin and became a pariah intimately familiar with harassment and the intense loneliness of social isolation. Still, East retained at least one local friend and subscriber— Charles Mantinband, the rabbi of Temple B'Nai Israel in Hattiesburg, who often memorized East's editorials.¹²

Rabbi Mantinband perceived the *Brown* ruling as a divine calling against racial injustice, and he invoked the history of Jewish persecution to encourage his congregants to criticize massive resistance. On January 1, 1955, Mantinband helped open an office in Jackson for the Southern Regional Council (SRC), an organization devoted to acquiring

¹¹ Quoting "Citizens Council Will Elect Officers April 3," *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1956. "Citizens Council Will Meet at Lumberton," *Hattiesburg American*, April 10, 1956; "Heber Ladner Will Be Citizens Council Speaker Tuesday," *Hattiesburg American*, April 27, 1956; "Citizens Council Meeting Tonight," *Hattiesburg American*, May 1, 1956; "Citizens Council Elects Conner District Chairman," *Hattiesburg American*, April 9, 1956.

¹² P. D. East, "Editorial Comment," *The Petal Paper*, November 22, 1956; East, *Magnolia Jungle*, 178-179; P. D. East, "On the Attainment of Distinction"; Albert Vorspan, "The Iconoclast of Petal, Mississippi," *The Reporter*, March 21, 1957, 33; East, *Magnolia Jungle*, 201-202; Clive Webb, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights 1880s-1990s*, 227-228.

equal opportunity for all southerners. On February 13, the executive committee reorganized the Mississippi SRC into the Mississippi Council on Human Relations (MCHR) of which Mantinband became chairman. MCHR focused on developing interracial forums to examine the impact of the *Brown* decision and actively sought representation for local blacks on school boards and police forces. The rabbi's public embrace of civil rights sent shockwaves and terror through his temple. Although a small religious minority with only some 50 families, most Jewish residents were prosperous, many of them upper-middle class retailers who collectively owned about half of the businesses in downtown Hattiesburg. They lived on the white side of town, integrated with white gentiles, and functioned as respected civic leaders. Although some congregants embraced racism; most of them knew it contradicted their scriptures, and they supported the rabbi, if only privately. Hattiesburg Jews understood that their privileged status was contingent upon their giving fealty, real or imagined, to white supremacy.¹³

Some Christian groups also disdained racial oppression; but they treaded carefully in the Central Piney Woods. Five years before *Brown*, in 1949, several white families helped Bishop Thomas M. Megan found and develop an integrated Catholic Church in Hattiesburg—Holy Rosary. The congregation included two members of the NAACP, Robert and Constance Baker, and their children, Robert Junior and Douglass. White supremacists ignored the church because during the 1950s, it stayed outside of the burgeoning Movement. Segregationists also ignored the progressive teaching of Sam Barefield, who directed the United Methodist Wesley Foundation student organization on

¹³ Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," 215-218, 222-224; Charles and Anna Mantinband to friends, December 1954, Mantinband Papers; Ruby S. Lyells to Friends of MCHR, n. d., SCR #2-131-0-3-1-1-1, MDAH.

the campus of Mississippi Southern. Although Barefield hailed from Hattiesburg and knew the dangerous racial climate, he dared to hold forums on race at MSC, and he took students on field trips to secret integrated meetings at Tougaloo College, a black private school, and Millsaps College, a white Methodist institution dedicated to social justice. The experiences had a powerful impact on students like Aubrey Lucas, who, in 1952, joined the group. Lucas remained involved after he graduated and became Director of Admissions at MSC. Although Lucas grew up in the Methodist church, Barefield further liberalized Lucas's racial views when he introduced him to Methodist literature that required Christians to fight social injustices, including racial oppression.¹⁴

Local blacks, under the auspices of the NAACP, became the most ardent racial reformers. Massive resistance, no matter its power, could neither quell the hope nor the opportunity that the *Brown* ruling birthed. In its wake, Mississippi's NAACP branches launched recruitment campaigns, and by January 1955, Mississippi membership had grown enough to open a state office in Jackson. The Laurel-Jones County branch boasted a membership of 332 by 1957, and the president of the branch, Dr. Benjamin Murph, also organized a youth council with 85 members. The Forrest County NAACP had less success, and its membership dwindled from 71 in 1951 to 20 persons in 1957 because of white resistance and black betrayals. African-American Reverend R. W. Woullard of the Bay Springs Church excommunicated Vernon Dahmer and several other men when they tried to form an NAACP organization in his church. Undeterred, Dahmer found several other ministers who opened their churches to the struggle.¹⁵

¹⁴ Quoting Aubrey Lucas, interview by Patricia Boyett, April 29, 2009. Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 24, 2008, MOHP recordings.

¹⁵ "Mississippi," Pt. 3, Ser. C, Reel 1; "1954 - Year of Challenge and Decision,"

Many ministers in the Central Piney Woods joined the NAACP and advanced the struggle. Reverend G. W. Williams from Forrest County and Reverend L. E. Piece from Jones County, both NAACP members, developed the Mississippi's Negro Ministerial Improvement Association (MIA)—a state-wide organization of black ministers dedicated to fighting for “political, economic, and social justice.” The MIA held its first meeting on March 11, 1957, at St. Paul's Methodist Church in Hattiesburg. The majority of the 59 attendees came from the Central Piney Woods, and ministers from Laurel and Hattiesburg dominated the leadership. The Sovereignty Commission considered the MIA a front for the NAACP, and commission investigators like W. G. Gray—who later became the sheriff of Forrest County—kept tight surveillance on both groups. Inspectors recorded the MIA's first meeting, and they developed files on NAACP and MIA members which they sent to the local police chiefs. Police also fed information to the White Citizens Councils and the Sovereignty Commission. In late 1958, Laurel Chief of Police Jeff Montgomery came into possession of Dr. Murph's briefcase, which contained copious NAACP correspondence and names and addresses of all local members. The

Annual Report Southeast Region NAACP, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 5; Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 5; Ruby Hurley to Medgar Evers, January 14, 1958, Pt. 25, Ser. B, Reel 2; Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, November 14, 1957, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14; Lucille Black to Dr. B. E. Murph, December 10, 1957, Pt. 27, Ser. A, Reel 10; Ruby Hurley to Medgar Evers, January 14, 1958, Pt. 25, Ser. B, Reel; 2, all in NAACP Papers. In 1951, there were 71 members in the Forrest County Branch of the NAACP, see LB to Ruby, November 18, 1951, Pt. 25, Ser. A, Reel 3, NAACP Papers. Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, September 29, 1992, MOHP Digital; Ellie Dahmer, speech, Symposium on Civil Rights in Hattiesburg, Gonzalez Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi, June 5, 2001, tape-recording, McCain, USM; J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, January 31, 1977, vol. 375, 12-13, MOHP. For Woullard and the NAACP, see, Report by Zack J. Van LANDINGHAM, December 17, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1, pp. 27-29, 35; SCR #2-70-6-1-1-1; W. L. E. Simes, “Mississippi,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 16, 1957, SCR #2-14-0-3-1-1-1, MDAH.

chief allowed the council and the commission to make copies of all the contents.¹⁶

The danger forced the NAACP branches in the Central Piney Woods to operate in secret. In Forrest County, the NAACP often met at Dahmer's farmhouse, but they always parked their vehicles at his store to make it appear that the vehicles belonged to black customers. Dahmer had much to lose by spearheading the racial struggle in Forrest County. He lost his second wife, Ora Lee, to an illness so he knew the pain death left behind. Still, he persevered. He also understood that his civil rights activism placed his livelihood at risk. By the early 1950s, Dahmer was becoming a wealthy man as his farm, store, service station, and mill continued to prosper. Though several of his six sons left Hattiesburg for college or the military, most of them planned on returning home to the family business. In 1952 Dahmer married a schoolteacher, Ellie J. Davis, and over the next four years, they had two children, Dennis and Bettie. By the mid-fifties, Dahmer had eight children, a young wife, and prosperity, but he did not have freedom. He wanted his children to live in an America that treated them as equals, so he not only remained a member of the NAACP, but in the late fifties he became the branch president. Dahmer's close friend, Clyde Kennard, had neither children nor a wife, and thus, he took even greater risks in the struggle when he dared to attack a sacred core of the white tyranny

¹⁶ Quoting L. C. Hicks to Ney H. Gore, SCR #2-3-0-6-2-1-1; Hal C. DeCell, MSSC Report, January 1, 1958, SCR # 2-3-0-11-1-1-1, MDAH. Hal C. DeCell to Ney Gore, February 28, 1957, SCR #2-3-0-3-1-1-1; L. C. Hick, to Ney H. Gore, Jr., stamped October 14, 1958, SCR #2-3-0-6-1-1-1 to 6-1-1; "Negro Ministers Release List of Main Objectives, October 5, 1957, SCR #2-3-0-9-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, October 9, 1958, SCR # 2-3-0-1-1-1; SCR #2-70-6-1-1-1, W. L. E. Simes, "Mississippi," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 16, 1957, SCR # 2-14-0-3-1-1-1, Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, December 19, 1958, SCR #2-14-0-7-2-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, December 19, 1958, SCR # 2-14-0-8-1-1-1 to 7-1-1; SCR # 2-14-0-10-1-1-1 through 165-1-1; W. G. Gray to L. C. Hicks, February 14, 1958, SCR #2-3-0-5-1-1-1, all at MDAH.

when he launched his dangerous crusade to desegregate MSC.¹⁷

By the 1950s, white residents in Forrest County perceived Mississippi Southern College, located on Hardy Street, as the precious jewel of the Hub City—a status its patriarchs fought hard to maintain. Prior to the mid 1940s, MSC had suffered from a marginalized reputation as a backwoods teacher’s school. Most of the local elite refused to send their sons and daughters to MSC, which they derisively referred to as “Hardy Street High.” President Robert Cecil Cook devoted his presidency to improving MSC’s reputation and seeking greater state funding. When Governor White rudely informed Cook that since Mississippi statesmen struggled to please the planters and hill farmers, they would never open the treasury to a “bunch of fiddlers” from MSC, Cook hosted a banquet at Hotel Heidelberg in Jackson at which MSC student athletes and musicians employed their charm and talent to convince the legislators to appropriate \$450,000 to build a new fine arts complex. Over the next several years, Cook launched massive building projects. To transform the culture of the campus, Cook recruited sororities and fraternities to the campus and hosted hundreds of parties to entertain faculty, students, and the city’s prominent citizenry. Between 1948 and 1950, the student population quadrupled from 300 to 2,000, and President Cook transformed the campus’s reputation from “Hardy Street High” into a thriving academic institution that determined the pulse

¹⁷ Raylawni Branch, interview by Kim Adams, October 25, 1993, MOHP Digital; Ellie Dahmer, by Orley B. Caudill, July 2, 1974, MOHP Digital; Douglass D. Baker, “Dahmer Tribute from Student at Ole Miss,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1966; Adam Cohen, “Widow and the Wizard,” *Time Magazine*, May 18, 1998, 72-73; Mario Rossilli, “Public Forum Held on Dahmer Case,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 1, 1995, Vernon F. Dahmer Collection, McCain, USM; Jerry Mitchell, “Prosecutors Want Justice,” *Clarion-Ledger*, August 17, 1998; Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 277-279; SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1, 10, 20-21, MDAH.

of the city.¹⁸

President Cook continued to bind local whites to the campus, in part by celebrating their fealty to the Confederacy and their pride in their white southernness. During Cook's tenure, the press referred to the football team as the "Southerners," a nickname the college quickly promoted. The administration changed the college mascot from the Yellow Jackets to "General Nat," a name derived from the Confederate General and first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Nathan Bedford Forrest. Cook named the marching band the Pride of Mississippi which became known for its "stirring new rendition of 'Dixie,'" and called the dance line the "Southern Belles," later changed by the press to "Dixie Darlings." MSC also hosted an annual Minstrel Show. The event began with a parade downtown at which black-faced Kiwanians, garbed in gaudy costumes, marched through the streets followed by the band from the all-white high school, colorful floats, the mayor, city leaders, and "carloads of pretty girls." At night, the black-faced men performed derogatory parodies of black life on MSC's campus with stereotyped characters named "Chicken," "Lightin,'" and "Curly." Whites considered derisive portrayals of black people great entertainment, and they flocked to the show. These parodies and Confederate and Klan representations celebrated a society that fought to maintain slavery and sustain a white privileged racial order, and they represented a heartfelt desire to exclude blacks from campus and society. MSC was—with the exception of the service staff—an all-white world that glorified white supremacy.¹⁹

¹⁸ First and third quotes, Chester M. Morgan, *Dearly Bought, Deeply Treasured: The University of Southern Mississippi, 1912-1987* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 77; second quote, *Ibid.*, 91. *Ibid.*, 78-104.

¹⁹ Morgan, *Dearly Bought, Deeply Treasured*, 99, 91, 134; "Eagle Mascot Began with a Bee," *Student Printz*, September 12, 1955, University of Southern Mississippi

When Kennard sought to enroll at MSC, he confronted an enraged campus and city. Although the Civil Rights Movement had not yet penetrated the Magnolia State, the threat of black equality terrified most white Mississippians. Universities stood as the bastions of enlightened thought, but in 1955, MSC not only reflected the xenophobic and racist society from which it had emerged, it served as a militant arm of white supremacy. President William D. McCain, a National Guard General and veteran of World War II and the Korean War who lorded over the institution from 1955 to 1975, wielded considerable power over the university and spurned criticism from subordinates, professors, students, and outsiders. He despised dissidents and targeted them with relentless fury. McCain considered African Americans inferior and defended segregation as both logical and necessary to sustain racial harmony and prevent miscegenation. He would never allow Kennard to desegregate MSC.²⁰

Kennard was as determined as McCain. Born in Forrest County on June 20, 1927,

Mascot Vertical File, McCain, USM; “Kiwanis Minstrel At MSC Tonight,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 5, 1951; “Kiwanis Minstrel A Hit 17th Time,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 13, 1956; Advertisement featuring photograph of minstrel performers and caption, *Hattiesburg American*, April 6, 1959.

²⁰ Monte Piliawsky, *Exit 13: Oppression and Racism in Academia* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 3-20, 76-77; William K. Scarborough, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 25, 2007, MOHP recording; “Some Reminiscences of the United States Archivist in Italy—Director William D. McCain on Military Leave from Mississippi Department of Archives and History,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, 21 (February 1972): 571-581; Address by Dr. W. D. McCain, Pro-American Forum, Chicago, Illinois, September 9, 1960, SCR file, Governor Paul Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, Series II, Subseries 9, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]. Currently USM only allows researchers to access a single box of the large William D. McCain Collection. The box contains a plethora of anti-communist and white supremacist materials collected by McCain as well as a copy of a speech he delivered. For the collection, see William D. McCain Collection, AM 97-5, McCain. The remainder of McCain’s papers remain closed with no indication of when, or if, the university will make them available. Nevertheless, witnesses to his administration, Piliawski’s *Exit 13*, various newspaper articles, and the papers of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission provide insight into McCain’s administration and his reaction to Kennard.

Kennard grew up on a small farm in the Kelly Settlement. When Kennard was only four, his father passed away. At the pubescent age of 12, he moved to Chicago to help his older sister, who had been briefly incapacitated by an injury. Kennard survived the gang-infested streets of Chicago by focusing on achieving high grades and working as a clerk at the Mutual Insurance Company. In September 1945, he joined the military and during his seven-year service as a paratrooper, which included tours in Germany and Korea, he earned four medals: the Bronze Star, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal. After he received an honorable discharge at the rank of sergeant in October 1952, he returned home to raise money for college tuition by tutoring the son of Dave A. Matison, the Jewish co-owner of the largest department store in town. In 1953, he moved to Illinois to attend the University of Chicago, but during his junior year in 1955, Kennard's step-father fell ill, and Kennard—always the dutiful son—returned home to help his mother run the poultry farm. He remained determined to finish his degree, even after his step-father passed away. To his mind, MSC, located a few miles from his farm, was the most logical place to complete his education.²¹

Soon after his return to Hattiesburg, Kennard contacted the college, revealed his race, and requested an application. When the registrar's office neglected to comply,

²¹ Ronald A. Hollander, "One Mississippi Negro Who Didn't Go to College," *The Reporter*, vol. XVII, 30 (November 8, 1962), Verner S. Holmes Collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as Holmes Collection, Williams, UM]; Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 277; Report by Zack J. Van Landingham, December 17, 1958, SCR #: 1-27-0-6-32-1-1, 11-12, 18-21, MDAH; Clyde Kennard Timeline, <http://www6.district125.k12.il.us/~bbradfor/kennardnytimes05.html> (accessed October 2006), [hereinafter cited as Clyde Kennard Timeline]; James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Hartcourt Brace & World Inc., 1963), 93-94; Dittmer, *Local People*, 79-80.

Kennard drove to campus and met with President McCain. McCain and his staff found Kennard intelligent and polite and even though he surpassed the academic requirements for acceptance at MSC, they never considered admitting him. Kennard submitted his application, but administrators refused to process it, and they ignored Kennard's repeated follow-up calls. MSC Security Officer John Reiter conducted an investigation into Kennard's background, but he found nothing to use against him. Neighbors described Kennard as honest, hardworking, and selflessly devoted to the needy. Because the family farm failed to produce much of a profit, Kennard toiled as a field laborer and a construction worker and tried his hand at business, but he was too kind-hearted. When he started a gardening service, he all too often allowed people to borrow his mowers rather than rent them. While working as an insurance agent for Security Life, he routinely used some of his earnings to keep afloat customers unable to make their payments.²²

Kennard approached his effort to desegregate MSC with the same kind-hearted manner. Because he found McCain polite and considered him intelligent and trustworthy, he thought that he could reason with the president and even suggested that McCain allow him to attend night classes to diminish student awareness of his presence. He confused McCain's politeness with goodness. Kennard failed to recognize the clever façade of civility used by the white conservative establishment to quash challenges to the racial order without generating national attention. Throughout the Movement years, the Hattiesburg patriarchs so brilliantly employed this façade that the town acquired a reputation for racial moderation, even while prominent whites falsely imprisoned and destroyed black activists. The Hub City patriarchs were just as determined as their

²² Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 277-279; Report by Zack J. Van Landingham, December 17, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1-1, 6-11, 20-21, MDAH.

counterparts in more notorious towns, like Greenwood and McComb, to sustain the racial order, but they were smarter. They only employed the force necessary to sustain their system. When cruelty and violence proved necessary, they generally managed to keep it out of public view. The MSC administration initially responded to Kennard's heresy by using established application stipulations to reject him. They could not process his application without five recommendations from MSC alumni. When he requested a list of alumni, they claimed not to possess such a list. For the moment, these tactics succeeded. After MSC refused to admit Kennard in 1955, the administration did not hear from him for several years.²³

During most of the reformation era, blacks focused their struggle on defeating another major pillar of Jim Crow—black disfranchisement. In 1949, Mississippi had cleared its registration rolls and required prospective voters to re-register. The Forrest County registrar, Luther Cox, stonewalled and intimidated the dozen or so blacks who tried to register, and when that failed, he disqualified them by arbitrarily failing them on the registration exam. Their preparation for the exam made no difference, for he asked them ridiculous, unanswerable questions like “how many bubbles are in a bar of soap?” Of course, he allowed whites to register without taking an exam. In 1951, a group of blacks, including two physicians, a pharmacist, an undertaker, and three ministers pooled \$1,000 and hired T. Price Dale, a northern Mississippi lawyer known for his sympathy to the black plight, to launch a voter discrimination suit against Cox. The Forrest County Bar Association tried to bribe Dale to drop the case by promising to pay him whatever fee the “Negroes” had offered. Dale refused. Judge Sidney C. Mize dismissed the petition,

²³ Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 277-279; Report by Zack J. Van Landingham, December 17, 1958, Kennard SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1, pages 6-11, MDAH; Raylawni Branch, interview by Kim Adams.

and the plaintiffs appealed. On June 21, 1951, the U. S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the ruling, but instead of implementing a federal injunction, the court ordered the plaintiffs to appeal to the board of election commissioners. If that failed, they could return to the court for redress. The plaintiffs appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court, but to no avail.²⁴

Undeterred, the local NAACP continued to build its case for suffrage. In the spring of 1952, Thurgood Marshall sent to the Department of Justice nine affidavits from Forrest County blacks, who alleged that Harold Cox refused to allow them to register. Still, the Department of Justice refused to act. Between 1949 and 1955, Cox registered 12,417 whites and 17 blacks. After March 24, 1955, until the end of his tenure on February 26, 1959, Cox only registered one African American, Erlene Beard. Because Beard possessed a mixed racial heritage, Cox mistook her for a white woman. Many black citizens persevered and made multiple attempts to register. Some tried as many as 50 times. Cox tried to intimidate them. When a school teacher, Clarence Magee, who had just bought a home in Hattiesburg after returning from military service in Germany, entered the circuit clerk's office with his poll tax receipt and requested an application to vote, Cox snarled: "What's your name boy? . . . Who sent you boy?" Over the next 10 years, Magee tried to register seven times, but all to no avail. Cox often left when blacks

²⁴ First quote, "NAACP Asks Probe of Mississippi Registrar," NAACP Press Release, May 1, 1952, Pt. 18, Ser .C, Reel 22, NAACP Papers, also in "Bubble Test Report False, Says Cox," *Hattiesburg American*, April 12, 1956, 1; second quote, E. Hammond Smith, by Orley B. Caudill, April 8, 1982, MOHP Digital. N. R. Burger, interview by R. Wayne Pyle, May 11, 1982, MOHP Digital; *Peay et al. v. Cox*, 190 F. 2d 123-127 (1951); Plaintiff's Proposed Findings, *United States v. Theron Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County and the State of Mississippi* (1962) case, no. 1646, in United States District Court, Southern District of Mississippi (1962) 9-13, 26-27, The United States of America vs. Theron C. Lynd Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited *United States v. Lynd* (1962), case no. 1646; and Lynd Collection], *Peay et al. v. Cox*, 342 U. S. 896 (1951); *Peay et al. v. Cox*, 190 F. 2d 123-127 (1951).

approached his office, and his deputies claimed they lacked the authority to distribute applications or proctor exams. However, according to eye-witness accounts by the disfranchised group, these same deputies registered white voters. Marshall entreated the Department of Justice to investigate.²⁵

In 1956 the Cox story became part of the national NAACP evidentiary arsenal exposing Mississippi's constitutional violation of the Fifteenth Amendment. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins testified before the Democratic Committee Platform about black disfranchisement in Mississippi. He aimed to goad the party to include a civil rights plank in its platform. Wilkins cited the decrease in black registration since the *Brown* decision and explained that Mississippi discriminated against black voters via biased exams, intimidation, and violence. He exposed Cox's methods of disqualifying prospective black voters—particularly the bar of soap question—as an example of persistent and blatant voter discrimination. In 1956, building on Wilkins's efforts, several of Forrest County's black citizens sought for the second time to launch a discrimination case against Cox. On October 16, 1956, Field Secretary for the Mississippi NAACP Medgar Evers acquired statements from Forrest County blacks who were denied the right to register.²⁶

The NAACP leaders hoped to bolster their case against Cox when they attended

²⁵ Quoting Clarence Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 25, 2008, MOHP recording. "NAACP Asks Probe of Mississippi Registrar," NAACP Press Release, May 1, 1952, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 22; "NAACP Asks Probe of Mississippi Registrar," NAACP Press Release, May 1, 1952, Pt. 18, Ser. C, Reel 22, all in NAACP Papers; *United States v. Lynd* (1962) case no. 1646, 9-13, 26-27; "Bubble Test Report False, Says Cox," *Hattiesburg American*, April 12, 1956.

²⁶ Statement by Governor J. P. Coleman to Platform Committee, Chicago, August 11, 1956, 11, J. P. Coleman Collection, Mitchell, MSU; "Progress and Reaction 1955," NAACP Annual Report, 28, Colmer Papers; Mississippi NAACP Monthly Reports, by Medgar Evers, October 25, 1956, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, NAACP Papers.

congressional hearings in Washington D. C. to testify in favor of the pending Civil Rights Act of 1957. The bill, if passed, would create the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights with power to investigate civil rights violations, establish a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice, and strengthen guarantees of voting rights. Reverend D. Ridgeway testified that he had resided in Forrest County for 30 years and had always abided by the laws and paid his taxes, but not once had the county permitted him to vote. He cited Forrest County's shameful record of black disfranchisement, and condemned it as an appalling condition in a democratic country. Ridgeway concluded that though the majority of Americans opposed black oppression, "the echoing silence of the legislative branch of our United States Government has been encouraging to those among us who would defy and destroy our constitution rather than make it applicable to all." Southern resistance notwithstanding, Congress passed the bill. Evers credited Reverend Ridgeway and other witnesses with the federal government's implementation of "the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction days."²⁷

After the bill's passage, the Jones and Forrest County NAACP chapters increased their recruitment and voter registration campaigns. In Jones County, Dr. Murph held numerous mass meetings at black churches at which he encouraged blacks to flood the

²⁷ First quote, United States Senate, 85th Congress, 1st Session, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, 1957* (Washington D. C. : GPO 1957), 564-565; second quote, Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, November 14, 1957, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, NAACP Papers. Alice A. Dunnigan, "Pastors Buttress Case Against Jim Crow During Rights Hearings," n. d., SCR # 2-5-1-38-1-1-2 and Sixth Annual Meeting of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, April 26, 1957, 16, SCR # 2-2-0-4-16-1-1, MDAH; Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, February 26, 1957, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, NAACP Papers; Civil Rights Act of 1957, Public Law 85-315; 71 Stat. 634, United States Congress, in *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November 1984, 14-22, John C. Stennis Collection, Mitchell, MSU; Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991), 58.

registration office until the registrar added their names to the books. Over the next several years, hundreds of blacks made the dangerous trip to the courthouse. In 1960, the Jones County registrar, Leonard Caves, desperately tried to stem the tide by intimidating black applicants, failing them on the exams, or claiming he had no record of their applications. Between January and late March 1960, he registered only 15 of the 60 blacks who came to his office. When NAACP member Maycie Gore tried to register, a white clerk snarled: “We’re not registering any n[iggers] today.” Gore and several others continually returned to the office until the registrar gave them the exam. Occasionally, blacks acquired help from whites sympathetic to their cause. Bob Holifield, a progressive wealthy white dentist who despised segregation, had opened a second dental clinic on the black side of town because, as he told his black bookkeeper, Cora Seals: “until I am free to open my front door, I will not open my back door.” When he learned that Caves had failed Seals on the registration exam, he called Caves and asked, “Did [you] know she is a college graduate and that social studies was [her] major, how could [she] fail that test?” On Holifield’s insistence, Seals returned to the registrar’s office: Caves had a “stone face” look, but he registered her. By January 5, 1961, 800 blacks had registered to vote in Jones County.²⁸

The Forrest County branch faced greater opposition. It had increased its membership by more than 100 percent and formed the Forrest County NAACP Youth

²⁸ First quote, Maycie Gore, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009; all other quotes, Cora Wade-Seals, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009, MOHP recordings. Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, October 22, 1958, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, NAACP Papers; Virgil Downing, NAACP Activity in Jones County, January 5, 1961, SCR #2-49-0-6-2-1-1; Hal C. DeCell to Carroll Gartin, stamped December 23, 1958, SCR # 2-14-0-18-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, June 18, 1959, SCR #2-14-0-20-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham to File, January 27, 1960, SCR #2-14-0-23-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham to File, March 21, 1960, SCR # 2-14-0-26-1-1-1; Membership List, stamped January 7, 1959, SCR # 2-68-0-23-1-1-1, all at MDAH.

Council with Kennard serving as president, Dahmer as advisor, and teenagers Dorie and Joyce Ladner as founding members, but it had much less success with black registration. When Theron Lynd assumed the clerk position in 1958, Kennard and fellow NAACP member Reverend John Barnes immediately visited his office. Lynd tried to intimidate them by asking if they belonged to the NAACP, and when that failed, he simply ordered them to leave. Barnes made a formal complaint to the Department of Justice and the Civil Rights Commission. In the spring of 1959, Barnes appeared before the House Committee on the Judiciary to support a bill that would allow the Civil Rights Division access to local voter registration records so it could build voter-discrimination cases against recalcitrant registrars. Barnes testified that only 25 of the 7,400 black people in Forrest County had managed to register to vote by the time of the hearing. Most of the 25 had only achieved such a feat because a white person vouched for them or because they possessed a mixed racial heritage and the registrar thought them white. Despite the massive opposition from Mississippi politicians, Congress passed the bill. Unmoved by the 1957 and 1960 civil rights acts, Lynd, with the help of Citizens Council President Dudley Connor, kept blacks off the voting rolls.²⁹

The White Citizens Council also targeted white sympathizers of the NAACP. The Citizens' Council demanded that the B'Nai Israel Temple Board fire Rabbi Mantinband

²⁹ Medgar Evers to Gloster Current, December 1, 1958, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15; Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, January 20, 1961, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15; Medgar Evers, "Onward to Freedom Justice and Equality," 1958, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, all in NAACP Papers. Joyce A. Ladner to Haley Barbour, April 5, 2006, Letters of Support, Clyde Kennard website. W. G. Gray to L. C. Hicks, February 14, 1958, SCR # 2-3-0-5-1-1-1; United States House, 86th Congress, 1st Session, *Civil Rights Hearings Before Subcommittee No. 5 of the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives, 1959* (Washington: GPO, 1959), 783-801, [hereinafter cited as *Civil Rights 1959 Hearings*]; Ross Barnett to Committee On Civil Rights, n. d., *Civil Rights 1959 Hearings*, 957-959; David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 151.

after he publicly defended the NAACP against white supremacist attacks. Although only one of the rabbi's congregants, Marvin Reuben, the general manager and co-owner of WDAM-TV, lambasted white supremacy publicly, most supported him, and the temple board refused to fire him. So, white supremacists began directly threatening Mantinband. White men kept constant surveillance on the rabbi and his wife, Anna. After a bombing of a Jewish synagogue in Atlanta, the former Hattiesburg mayor and the new president of the local Citizens Council, approached Mantinband on the street and informed him, "I told my boys at the last Council meeting how foolish it was to bomb a synagogue which, after all was lifeless." Instead, they should target Mantinband. The rabbi calmly informed the ex-mayor that he would report the threat to the FBI: "If ever in the next ten years anything happens to me I'm going to ask them to arrest you for creating the climate in which this type of thing would be possible." The man never approached Mantinband again, but still the white patriarchs watched him, read his mail, and kept files on him.³⁰

In Hattiesburg, the hostile racial milieu often incited radical whites to violence. Gangs of white men routinely assaulted blacks, particularly teenagers and women. On one occasion, they beat a group of young teens; on another, they pelted a black pedestrian with eggs. One night, white men so brutally beat a 17-year-old teenager that he fell into unconsciousness. Police neglected to investigate any of these crimes. Enraged, East used his newspaper to attack the third pillar of the white tyranny—white violence and racial injustice. He blamed the Citizens Councils for the attacks because they laced their rhetoric with calls for suppression of threats to the racial order. East claimed that ignorant

³⁰ Quoting Allen Kreuse, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," 159-160; Anna Kest Mantinband, "Time for Remembering," (1979), 72-73; Charles Mantinband, "Rabbi in the Deep South," *ADL Bulletin*, n. d., all in Mantinband Papers. Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," 214-226.

bigots, who suffered from inferiority complexes, capitalized on the council rhetoric to reestablish through violence their sense of superiority. The cowardice of the attacks galled East too. Blacks, East warned, may need to use violence to protect their communities, since the local justice system had so egregiously failed in that capacity.³¹

In the history of white tyranny in the Central Piney Woods, blacks who defended themselves against whites faced dire consequences. After the lynching of Howard Wash resulted in federal intervention, whites used the gavel rather than the rope to enforce the racial order—most notably in the McGee case. They also relied on the badge. Policemen became one of the greatest sentinels of the absolutist state and their brutality a useful method of maintaining white supremacy. In late May 1958, a black teenager, Samuel Johnson, Jr., became their latest victim when May Saliba, a white woman, complained to Hattiesburg police that she had spotted a prowler outside her home. Neighbors complained that they had seen a black male in the area. Hoping to catch the prowler, two white officers staked out her home the following night. According to the officers, they spotted Johnson trying to break into Saliba's home by cutting her screen door with a knife. The officers ordered him to stop, but Johnson ran. The officers shot him twice. The first bullet pierced Johnson's ankle. The second penetrated his hip, sliced through his liver, and ricocheted into his heart. Within seconds, he died.³²

³¹ Albert Vorspan, "The Iconoclast of Petal, Mississippi," *The Reporter*, March 21, 1957, 33; P. D. East, "On the Attainment of Distinction," 16-18, P. D. East Collection, McCain, USM; Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, August 25, 1959, SCR #1-62-0-1-1-1-1; P. D. East, "The Bigger And Better Bigots Bureau," *The Petal Paper*, June 7, 1956.

³² For a discussion of the Jim Crow legal system in Mississippi, see Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 201-206, 210-212; Fellowship of the Concerned, Southern Regional Council, "Dual Justice in the Courts," 4-5, 8-9, Addendum 1978, A.

In the Jim Crow world, blacks had rarely challenged suspicious police homicides. Yet the killing so devastated Johnson's best friend, Melvin Adams, that his anger overwhelmed his fear. In a bold protest, Adams sent a letter to the *Hattiesburg American* that condemned police officers as a militant arm of white tyranny. He and Johnson had just returned from a school field trip in New Orleans, and Johnson had no intention of committing a crime. Police lied about the attempted break-in to Saliba's home to cover up their murderous response to a black male in a white neighborhood. He asked: "Why did the police kill Samuel Johnson Jr.? . . . Are police supposed to go around killing people? . . . We Negro children are almost afraid to walk the streets after dark for fear we will be shot down like some dog or cat." He even dared to suggest that God would judge the killers someday. Within days, local MIA members embraced Adams' protest. The fact that Johnson was unarmed and running from the police when the officers shot him twice, demanded an investigation.³³ The city failed to act.

Police brutality in another case invited suspicions about the Johnson shooting. Less than three weeks after the Johnson incident, the Hattiesburg Civil Service Commission held hearings on charges involving the police beating of a white MSC student, Hugh Ackis. In early May, three officers brutalized Ackis when he criticized their failure to investigate a gambling ring. Mayor Richard Carlisle not only fired the three officers, he demoted Chief W. N. Johnson to the rank of patrolman and suspended

E., Cox Collection, Mitchell, MSU. For the Johnson killing, see "Prowler Killed," *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 1958; "Bullet Killed Negro, Autopsy Discloses," *Hattiesburg American*, May 30, 1958.

³³ First quote, Melvin Adams, "The Shooting," *Hattiesburg American*, June 2, 1958; second quote, T. H. Wingfield, G. C. Fairley, B. J. Hines, Willie R. Nobles, and W. H. Haller to Mayor and City Council, June 3, 1958, Ser. 2, Reel 1, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Papers, Microfilm, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SCLC Papers].

him for 30 days without pay for failing to control his men. During an appeal hearing, city attorneys proved their case and showed that one officer had a history of police brutality. The commission upheld the mayor's decision. The Ackis and Johnson cases revealed a pattern of police brutality and the willingness of the white populous and city fathers to excuse such savagery against blacks. Just as whites had refused to consider charges of police brutality in the McGee case, whites—informed by the black beast mythology—rejected suspicions of police in the Johnson homicide. They assumed McGee guilty of rape and Johnson guilty of planning to rape Saliba. They never considered the possibility that the police might have lied. Blacks knew. After all, Laurel's police chief, Jeff Montgomery, and Hattiesburg's future chief, Hugh Herring, had been primary participants in the police brutality against Willie McGee. At the least, by 1957, the black response to the police state had changed. Unlike in the McGee case, blacks protested, albeit softly, the police homicide of a black teenager.³⁴ They also rose from their bunkers to protest racial injustice when their beloved Clyde Kennard became the target of white men.

In late 1958, Kennard resumed his solitary battle against segregation, and with words and deeds, he developed a powerful thesis that exposed the absurdity of Jim Crow.

In October 1958, he requested another application from MSC. On December 6, in a letter

³⁴ R. T. Carlisle to W. N. Johnson, W. F. Nicholas, James C. Smith, William E. Trussell, and Lester W. Blackburn, May 19, 1958. These letters inform each officer of their suspensions or demotions, all in, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as HMR]. For earlier brutality case, see "Hercules Attorney Injured," *Hattiesburg American*, June 15, 1949, HMR, McCain, USM. For the facts and trial of the case, see "Commission Opens Beating Inquiry: Police Case Is Re-Examined," *Hattiesburg American*, June 16, 1958; "Mayor Testifies In Beating Inquiry," *Hattiesburg American*, June 17, 1958; "Ex-Chief Tells of Investigation," *Hattiesburg American*, June 18, 1958; "Beating Case Penalties Are Upheld," *Hattiesburg American*, June 19, 1958; Mayor R. T. Carlisle to all concerned, HMR, McCain, USM; L. W. Blackburn to Mayor and Commissioners, June 30, 1958, HMR.

to the *Hattiesburg American*, Kennard revealed the impossibility of achieving a separate but equal society. He wondered, after blacks and whites completed their separate educations, “where do our parallels of separate but equal go?” He asked, “Are we to assume that parallel hospitals are to be built for the two groups of doctors? Are we to build two bridges across the same stream in order to give equal opportunities to both groups of engineers? Are we to have two courts of law as to give both groups of lawyers the same chance to demonstrate their skills; two legislatures for our politically inclined, and of course two governors?” Because the parallel worlds did not and could not exist, separate was unequal. Only integration, he concluded, would solve the race problem.³⁵

Since Kennard’s last attack on segregation, the white patriarchs had grown more adept at their suppression of black activism. That summer, Governor James P. Coleman confined African-American Clennon King to the Whitfield mental hospital after he applied to the University of Mississippi. They would also find creative means to eliminate the Kennard heresy. Sovereignty Commission Inspector Zack Van Landingham kept tabs on Kennard’s activities through his informant, Reverend Woullard. The patriarchs also tried economic intimidation. On orders from the governor, Van Landingham threatened the local bank with an inspection if it refused to divulge Kennard’s financial records. Citizen Council leader Dudley Connor desired a more violent response. He considered Kennard and Dahmer the most dangerous activists in Forrest County. The Citizens Council, he informed Van Landingham, could make Kennard disappear; his car “could be hit by a train or he could have some accident on the highway and nobody would ever know the difference.” Connor repeatedly told friends

³⁵ Quoting Clyde Kennard to editor, *Hattiesburg American*, December 6, 1958. Zach J. Van Landingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, December 17, 1958, SCR # 9-0-0-27-1-1-1, 7.

that “what Mississippi needed was a real good lynching.”³⁶

Mississippi had its lynching in April 1959, just 30 miles southwest of Hattiesburg. Two months earlier, on February 24, a black had man raped June Walters, a white resident of Forrest County, when her vehicle broke down on a deserted road in neighboring Pearl River County. Officers quickly arrested Mack Charles Parker, and Walters shakily identified Parker by his voice. Officer W. G. Gray, a former Commission Inspector and future Forrest County Sheriff, handed his pistol to June’s husband Jimmy and asked: “Son, you got a gun or do you want mine?” Jimmy refused to murder Parker, but Mississippi was determined to have its lynching. On April 25, a white mob broke into the jail, dragged Parker from his cell, transported him to the state line, and shot him. The FBI investigation led to the arrest of 18 suspects, but the grand jury failed to indict any of them. Outraged, Rabbi Mantinband blamed “the Citizens’ Council and Sovereignty Commission [which] more and more resemble the gestapo of the Nazis.” Dahmer channeled his rage into expanding the NAACP, for it needed more members to effectively fight racial injustice. Among others, Dahmer recruited Dr. C. E. and Jeanette Smith, who had just moved to Hattiesburg from Jones County. Dahmer pointed out to Dr. Smith that as a physician treating black patients, he enjoyed economic freedom from whites. Still, the Smiths, like all blacks, risked their very lives by joining the NAACP. Although the lynching of Parker was the last mob killing in Mississippi, racial murders

³⁶ Quoting Van Landingham to Director, May 4, 1959, SCR #5-3-1-19-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham, MSSC Report, December 17, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1, 6-35; Zack Van Landingham to File, December 18, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-15-1-1-1; Memo, Zack Van Landingham to File, December 22, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-16-1-1-1; Zack J. Van Landingham, MSSC Report, December 17, 1958, SCR #1-27-0-6-32-1-1 through 37-1-1, pp. 6-33, MDAH. Douglas Starr, “Negro Prof Who Tried to Enroll at Ole Miss Taken to Whitfield,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 1958; James P. Coleman, Profile of a Man in the News, *Southern Reporting Service*, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers.

continued.³⁷

Kennard became Mississippi's next victim when he refused to surrender his fight to desegregate MSC. In late August 1959, Kennard sent a letter to Admissions Director Aubrey Lucas announcing his plans to apply and noting that the college should view integration as a positive economic development for the state because it would raise the educational level of black residents. The admissions department never received Kennard's application. Someone much more powerful than Lucas intercepted it. Lucas empathized with Kennard's crusade, for he remained committed to the Methodist teachings of social justice. He and his wife tried to cross the racial boundaries in their personal lives when they asked their black nanny to dine with them in their home. She obliged them, but her discomfort was obvious. Blacks and whites never ate together—it was not acceptable. In the strange southern racial relationships, black domestics and their white families often shared deep familial bonds to the point that at funerals a black domestic sat with the white family. The Jim Crow society accepted these public displays of human connections in such moments, but on a daily basis mixing socially was

³⁷ First quote, Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13; *Ibid.*, xi, 3-13, 17-23, 52-55, 68-76; second quote, Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," 219. Officer Gray denied that he ever offered his gun to Walters, see William G. "Bud" Gray, interview by Charles Bolton, March 19, 1999, vol. 728, 19-20, MOHP. For Gray's later career see, "Bud Gray Elected Sheriff," *Hattiesburg American*, August 28, 1963. For Parker lynching, investigation, and response, see, W. C. Shoemaker, "FBI Enters Search For Mob's Victim: Fear Negro Is Dead After Cell Beating," *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 26, 1959; and R. W. Bachman to Governor Coleman, May 25, 1959; Summary of FBI File on Charles Mack Parker Lynching, May 25, 1959, both in Governor J. P. Coleman Collection, Record Group 27, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as RG]. Stanley Meisler, "Department of Justice Moves in Lynch Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 6, 1959; "Parker Lynch Probers Return No Indictments," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 14, 1960; Charles Mantinband, "Rabbi in the Deep South," *ADL Bulletin*, n. d., David Z. Ben-Ami Papers, McCain, USM; Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 251- 252.

forbidden. Lucas knew that he lived in a world and worked on a campus circumscribed by Jim Crow, and he perceived himself powerless to help Kennard. He believed that Governor Coleman would close MSC before he allowed it to integrate. Lucas considered the University of Mississippi the only college safe from closure because most of the state's politicians had graduated from the university; its powerful alumni would never allow its closure.³⁸

President McCain differed greatly from Lucas; he was a rabid white supremacist. Moreover, he considered MSC his fiefdom, and he wielded all of his power to protect it. On September 7, 1959, McCain spent 45 minutes trying to dissuade Kennard from submitting his application. The president pointed out that Kennard's efforts would cause great tension between the races and place Kennard in grave danger. Kennard refused to yield. He revealed that although the NAACP was not currently involved in his efforts, if the college refused to admit him, he planned to file a federal lawsuit, which the NAACP had pledged to support. After the meeting, McCain rushed to Jackson to meet with Van Landingham and Governor Coleman. When they examined Kennard's submission, the men realized that Kennard had resubmitted his December 1958 application with a slight alteration—he had erased and rewritten the dates on the application and the date of his last medical exam. The men concocted a plan to deny Kennard's admission by charging him with fraud. To that end, Van Landingham and Director of Security John Reiter interviewed Charles Smith, the doctor who had signed Kennard's physical exam. Smith was a member of the NAACP, and the investigators found him "cold, indifferent, and

³⁸ Aubrey Lucas, interview; Clyde Kennard to Aubrey K. Lucas, September 2, 1959, SCR # 1-27-0-29-7-1-1, and 1-1-1 through 6-1-1; Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, August 27, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-26-1-1-1; Van Landingham to Director, August 28, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-27-1-1-1, MDAH.

suspicious during the interview.” He refused to sit or to invite the men into his office, but he reluctantly admitted that he had not examined Kennard since December 1958. He rejected their request to serve on a visitation committee to persuade Kennard to withdraw his application.³⁹

Undeterred, Van Landingham coerced black educators to convince Kennard to cease his campaign. Some of them initially refused. One local black principal, N. R. Burger, feared his community might consider him an “Uncle Tom.” He insisted Kennard had a right to apply to MSC, but he conceded that the school would never admit him. By the close of the interview, he consented to help the commission. The black educators reluctantly participated, as they desired to find a middle ground between activism and apathy. When they finally agreed to serve on the ad hoc committee, they requested a favor in return—the establishment of a black junior college in the area. Essentially, they adopted an accommodationist posture analogous to that of Booker T. Washington. Van Landingham also turned to the Jewish community for help, including Dave Matison and Rabbi Mantinband, as he surely understood that he could likely intimidate members of the religious minority. Matison had grown close to Kennard, who worked for his family, and he empathized with his plight. Matison and Mantinband reluctantly met with Kennard, but they failed to deter him. The patriarchs also tried economic intimidation. The Southern Farm Bureau Insurance Company canceled Kennard’s vehicle insurance on the grounds that his attempt to desegregate MSC may lead to an “accident,” which made

³⁹ Quoting Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 14, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-36-1-1-1, MDAH. Van Landingham to Director, September 9, 1959, SCR # 1-27-0-31-1-1-1, MDAH.

Kennard a financial risk for the company. Still, Kennard persisted.⁴⁰

When Kennard announced plans to appear on campus on registration day, McCain, his investigator Reiter, the White Citizens Council, and Forrest County law enforcement conspired to terminate the Kennard heresy. Although Kennard had received warnings from friends that McCain had affiliations with the White Citizens' Council, he failed to become suspicious when McCain contacted him on the morning of September 15 and arranged a meeting at 9:00 am. Rather, he considered the call a courteous act by the president. When Kennard arrived late for the meeting, entering McCain's office around 9:17 a.m., he found McCain and Van Landingham waiting for him. Kennard advised the men that he rejected pleas by the delegation to withdraw his application. On McCain's summons, Admissions Director Lucas entered the room and handed Kennard a formal letter rejecting his application on the grounds that he lacked good moral character as evinced by his fraudulent medical examination and that he had failed to send his proper transcript from the University of Chicago. The letter also falsely claimed that the University of Chicago had denied him re-admission resulting in his automatic rejection by MSC. Although the MSC admission's office prepared the letter—the contents had been decided by Governor Coleman, McCain, and the Sovereignty Commission.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Quoting Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 14, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-36-1-1-1 and 1-27-0-36-611 respectively; see, also, SCR#1-27-0-36-2-1-1 through 6-1-1, all at MDAH. Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 14, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-36-1-1-1 through 6-1-1. For the accommodationist approach used by black Mississippians during Jim Crow, see McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 288, 297-302. McMillen explains that accommodation reflected a survivalist response to the absolutist state, though not a submission to permanent inferiority. It served as the "second phase" of the "Dark Journey" traveled by blacks during the Jim Crow era from resistance to accommodation, to revolt (quotes, 297, 288). As McMillen argues, blacks often found that "compromise seemed to them wiser than confrontation" (quote, 299).

⁴¹ Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, SCR #1-27-

The meeting ended at 9:39 a.m. and McCain's staff escorted Kennard out the side door to avoid the media, which earlier reported that Kennard might try to enroll. Kennard returned to his locked vehicle where he found Constables Lee Daniels and Charley Ward waiting for him. They charged him with reckless driving and arrested him. One of the constables drove Kennard to the station, while the other followed in Kennard's vehicle. During his interrogation at the Hattiesburg Police Department, the constables entered the station with a paper bag containing several half-pints of illegal liquor in the dry state that they claimed to have found in Kennard's vehicle. Later, Daniels and Ward claimed that they had spotted Kennard in his vehicle on the highway, just after they received a tip that someone fitting his description was transporting liquor in the area. They pursued Kennard, but he escaped them by speeding. Later, they saw the vehicle at MSC and arrested him.⁴² The constables lied.

Kennard took back roads to campus rather than the highway, as the conspirators had assumed, and the constables had alleged. He had made several stops during his journey to campus and had several witnesses to verify his claims. He transported his mother to their potato patch, visited a local minister in Hattiesburg, and transported a family friend to her home. Moreover, the constables could not have seen Kennard's

0-40-1-1-1, 1-3; Aubrey K. Lucas to Clyde Kennard, September 14, 1959, attached to memo, Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-40-1-1-1, all at MDAH; "Negro Refused Admittance At MSC, Then Arrested," *Hattiesburg American*, September 15, 1959. Ronald Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 280.

⁴² Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-40-1-1-1, 3; Ron Hollander, "One Mississippi Negro Who Didn't Go to College," 31; "Negro Asks Action on MSC Application," *Hattiesburg American*, September 12, 1959; "Welcome Students Tuesday," *Hattiesburg American*, September 14, 1959; "Negro Refused Admittance at MSC, Then Arrested," *Hattiesburg American*, September 15, 1959.

parked vehicle on campus from the main road. They would have had to deliberately drive through campus in search of him. Finally, everyone in Forrest County knew that Kennard never consumed nor sold liquor. Although historian John Dittmer argues that the “two zealous constables . . . acted on their own” to bring down Kennard, the evidence points to a much larger conspiracy. However, if the Sovereignty Commission was involved, its lead investigator on the Kennard case, Van Landingham, was not one of the players. After the arrest, Van Landingham immediately contacted the governor’s office to inform him that neither he nor the state police had “anything to do with the arrest,” and that he considered it a “frame-up with the planting of the evidence in Kennard’s car.”⁴³

The evidence suggests that the Forrest County Citizens Council joined or initiated the conspiracy with Reiter, McCain, law enforcement, and possibly unknown others to dispose of Kennard in a “civilized” manner. Van Landingham’s investigation supports this theory. Reiter had recently told Van Landingham that several whites had approached him about either placing dynamite in Kennard’s starter or planting liquor in his vehicle and arranging his arrest. A year earlier, Citizens Council co-founder, Dudley Connor, had suggested killing Kennard. After the arrest, the outgoing District Attorney Daniel W. Dabbs informed Van Landingham that he suspected that Constable Daniels had carried out the frame job. Constable Daniels knew Connor well because he had served as acting secretary of the Forrest County White Citizens Council while Connor was president of the organization. He also suspected Reiter. Sheriff Bob Waller and Dabbs “confidentially informed” Van Landingham that Reiter had recently expressed several “outlandish and

⁴³ First quote, Dittmer, *Local People*, 82; all other quotes, Van Landingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-40-1-1-1, 3-6. Ronald Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 280-282; “Negro Rejected By Southern May Accept Help of NAACP,” *Daily News*, n. d., SCR #, 1-27-0-35-1-1-1; Ronald Hollander, “One Mississippi Negro Who Didn’t Go to College,” 31.

radical ideas” about how to prevent Kennard’s admittance to MSC. Considering the autocratic atmosphere of MSC, it appears highly unlikely that Reiter would act on a conspiracy with the Citizens Council without receiving orders, or at the least, tacit consent from President McCain. The conspirators likely ordered the constables to wait for Kennard on the highway, knowing when he would pass by them because McCain would summon him to arrive on campus by 9:00 a.m. When the constables located his vehicle, they were to pull him over, plant the whiskey, and arrest him before he arrived on campus. Kennard foiled their plans by taking back roads. Unable to intercept him, the constables drove to campus, located his vehicle, arrested him when he approached, and planted the liquor.⁴⁴

The arrest failed to deter Kennard from his crusade. After Kennard’s release on a \$600 bond, he met with local activists to determine the next course of action. He had no idea yet that the justice system was willing to use all of its considerable power to destroy him. The prosecutor in the Kennard case, James Finch, was considered a pillar of the white community. He had served in World War II, and though he never attended college, he had diligently studied the law and passed the bar exam. He became District Attorney of Perry and Forrest counties in 1948, served until 1951, and had just been reelected. He was also a staunch segregationist of the conservative mold, and he prosecuted Kennard with enthusiasm. Some Jewish residents initially came to Kennard’s defense. During a

⁴⁴ For theories and evidence of the conspiracy, see Ronald Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 280-282; Van Landingham to J. P. Coleman, September 21, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-40-1-1-1, 3-6, MDAH. For the autocratic milieu of MSC, see Monte Piliawsky, *Exit 13*, 3-20. For participation by Dudley Connor and Lee Daniels in the Citizens Council, see “Citizens Council Will Elect Officers April 3,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1956. For Connor’s remarks to Van Landingham about the Citizens Council’s offer to dispose of Kennard see, Van Landingham to Director, May 4, 1959, SCR #5-3-1-19-1-1-1, MDAH.

social visit with the Finch family, Lou Ginsberg said to Finch, “Oh Jimmy, you know [Kennard] didn’t do that. Y’all were just doing that ‘cause he’s trying to get into Southern.”” Ginsberg had expressed a common belief among local Jews, but her bold articulation of such suspicions to Finch terrified her husband. He nudged her, and she fell silent. Matison and Mantinband offered to serve as character witnesses for Kennard at his trial, but Justice of the Peace T. C. Hobby instructed them to “go home, boys. You can’t help this bird. We’re going to throw the book at him.” The Ginsbergs, Mantinbands, and Matisons, all white progressives, opposed racial oppression and empathized with Kennard, but they lived in dangerous times. Their fear overwhelmed their hatred for injustice. So, after initial denunciations, they fell silent.⁴⁵

The NAACP rushed to Kennard’s defense with much greater vigor. The President of the Forrest County NAACP, Reverend John Barnes, and the board members of the Mississippi State Conference embraced Kennard’s case and hired R. Jess Brown, one of the few black lawyers in the state, to defend him. The Forrest County judicial system had no interest in providing Kennard with a fair trial. On September 29, on the flimsy testimony of the constables, Justice Hobby found Kennard guilty and fined him \$600. Kennard appealed. The court failed to notify Brown of the appeal date in mid-October, and Judge William Harrelson confirmed the conviction in the absence of Kennard. Brown appealed to the circuit court. During these court battles, Kennard also faced considerable economic intimidation. He had financed his family’s poultry farm of 3,000 chickens with a loan from the Forrest County Co-op on the agreement that when the chickens produced

⁴⁵ Quoting, Webb, “Big Struggle in a Small Town,” 221. For Jimmy Finch’s background, see, “District Atty. Finch Asks Re-election,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 14, 1963. Jack Nelson, “Tough Prosecution Led to Convictions,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 19, 1995; “Negro Rejected by Southern May Accept Help of NAACP,” *Daily News*, SCR #1-27-0-35-1-1-1, MDAH.

eggs, he would begin repaying the loan. After his arrest, the co-op not only terminated Kennard's credit but initiated and won a lawsuit that forced Kennard to immediately pay back the entire loan. Kennard's friends helped him, and he hoped to pay them back once his farm made a profit. The co-op had a policy of giving or selling damaged feed at a discounted price to an employee, 19-year-old Johnnie Roberts, who then sold it to various chicken farmers, including family friends like Kennard—that is until the Co-op forbade him from doing so.⁴⁶

During these tense months in Hattiesburg, John Howard Griffin, a white reporter who disguised himself as a black man and traveled the South in a social experiment to understand the sufferings blacks confronted, visited Hattiesburg. He considered it a terrifying place, and later described Mobile Street in his classic, *Black Like Me*, as “loud and raw, with tension as thick as fog.” Blacks spoke to him and each other in hushed, angry tones about the framing of Kennard, the lynching of Parker, and the groups of white men who scoured their neighborhoods to assault blacks for sport. In Hattiesburg, the realization of life as a black man consumed Griffin, and he compared it to “hell [which] could be no more lonely or hopeless, nor more agonizingly estranged from the world of order and harmony.” Of course, he could erase his black skin, escape the cruelties he confronted, and return to the privilege of whiteness. Kennard could not escape his blackness, but he could and did embrace it as a crusade to fight for the

⁴⁶ Medgar Evers to Robert Carter, September 16, 1959, Pt. 22, Reel 2, NAACP Papers; “Negro Convicted On Two Charges,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 30, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-48-1-1-1, MDAH; “Kennard Back In Jail When Bond Not Posted,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, October 15, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-52-1-1-1, MDAH. Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, October 26, 1959, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, NAACP Papers; Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 283; Memo in Support of Application for Clemency of Clyde Kennard to Haley Barbor, Pardon Docket No. 06-0005, 20, in Tougaloo Collection, MDAH.

liberation of his race and break the color line that strangled the South.⁴⁷

On January 26, 1960, Kennard sent a letter to the *Hattiesburg American* in which he explained his dual motives for applying to MSC. First, he explained that he could not currently leave his home, and MSC was the only public four-year college in the Piney Woods. Second, he proposed that the time had come to destroy Jim Crow, as he argued that segregation and discrimination caused “ignorance, immorality and poverty” which damaged the socioeconomic status of the state. If Mississippi desired to become a productive state of educated and employed individuals, Kennard reasoned, it must reward people with education and employment based on merit rather than race. Van Landingham reported that despite the letter, local authorities informed him that it had no effect on the black community, and all appeared quiet on the racial front. In March, the circuit court judge, Stanton Hall, affirmed the lower court’s conviction of Kennard. The city fathers believed that the courts had terminated the threat to MSC.⁴⁸

Then, on September 21, 1960, the conspirators who had suppressed the Kennard heresy must have looked at the front page of the *Hattiesburg American* with consternation. In the lead article, “NAACP Will Attack Mississippi,” NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall announced that he had a school desegregation lawsuit in every southern state except Mississippi, but he planned to launch a case as soon as a client emerged. Marshall asserted, “I promise you, it won’t be long before Mississippi

⁴⁷ John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Signet Books, 1962, Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Edition 1996), 67-69.

⁴⁸ Quoting Clyde Kennard to Editor, *Hattiesburg American*, January 26, 1960; Zack J. Van Landingham to J. P. Coleman, September 14, 1959, SCR #1-27-0-36-1-1-1, 4; Van Landingham to File, January 29, 1960, SCR #1-27-0-60-1-1-1; “Legal Fight Lost By Negro Farmer,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 7, 1960, SCR #1-27-0-63-1-1-1, MDAH. Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, December 20, 1960, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, NAACP Papers.

rejoins the union. And we're going to help it happen." After MSC rejected Kennard's application in 1959, Governor Coleman allegedly stated, "If Clyde did reapply, there'd be no way of holding him out because his record was sufficient. There'd be no alternative but to close the college." The white patriarchs would never allow that to happen, but they knew that Kennard remained determined to desegregate MSC. They also knew that Mississippi law barred persons convicted of felonies from attending a state university, so they framed him. On September 25, a grand jury indicted Kennard and Johnny Roberts for stealing five sacks of chicken feed from the Forrest County Co-Op after Roberts confessed that he and Kennard conspired to steal the feed.⁴⁹

Once again, blacks in the community mobilized to protect Kennard. The NAACP re-hired Brown to represent him. Brown filed a motion to quash the indictment, arguing that since Forrest County discriminated in its selection of qualified voters, it created all-white juries in direct violation of the constitutional right to a jury of one's peers. Brown questioned several white city leaders, including Circuit Clerk Theron Lynd, Chancery Clerk Clyde Easterling, District Attorney James Finch, and several Forrest County supervisors. Although they all testified that Forrest County had registered and selected blacks for jury duty over the years, none could produce any specifics or exact numbers.

⁴⁹ First and second quotes, "NAACP Will Attack Mississippi," *Hattiesburg American*, September 21, 1959; third quote, Ronald Hollander, "One Mississippi Negro Who Didn't Go to College," 32. Grand Jury Indictment, *Clyde Kennard vs. State of Mississippi* (1961), case no. 41890, transcript, Mississippi Supreme Court Records, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as *Kennard v. Mississippi* (1961), transcript]; "New Charges Are Filed Against Clyde Kennard," *Hattiesburg American*, September 26, 1960. In 2006, the state exonerated Kennard after it recognized his innocence of the charges and noted that "Clyde Kennard was prosecuted to prevent his enrollment as the first African-American to be enrolled at Mississippi Southern College," though it names no conspirators. For exoneration, see Judgment of Exoneration and Declaration of Innocence, *State of Mississippi v. Clyde Kennard* (May 17, 2006), case no. 5833, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Lynd, a Citizens Council member, admitted that as registrar, he denoted race in the poll books by placing a “w” for white or a “c” for colored next to registered persons’ names; however, he contended it would take a month to compile a racial breakdown. According to the Department of Justice records developed nearly a year later, as of July 6, 1961, only 16 blacks out of the 7,495 eligible black voters had registered. With great bravery, four black witnesses, including B. F. Bourn and Vernon Dahmer, testified that voter discrimination was rampant in Forrest County. Dahmer registered once in 1948, and Bourn registered in the 1930s, but then the county cleared the books and made new voting rolls. Dahmer sought to register at least five more times, and since 1949, Bourn had visited the clerk’s office once a year to register, but all to no avail. Judge Hall overruled the motion to quash the indictment and set the court date for the following Thursday despite objections by Brown that he had a previous court commitment that prevented him from preparing for Kennard’s trial.⁵⁰

In November 1960, *Mississippi v. Clyde Kennard*, like the McGee case during the early fifties, proved nothing short of an inquisition designed to suppress the latest heresy. Under the threat of harm from the white conspirators, Roberts testified that he stole the feed on Kennard’s orders. He arrived at the co-op at 4:40 a.m. on Sunday morning, sneaked inside the unlocked door, and retrieved multiple sacks of chicken feed, which he transported to Kennard’s chicken house as planned. Roberts made several blunders during his testimony. He claimed that Kennard suggested that he leave the latch locking the warehouse unhitched before he left work at noon on Saturday, which meant the request had to come prior to that time. When Finch inquired the day that Kennard made

⁵⁰ Hearing on Motion to Quash Indictment and Court Order, *Clyde Kennard vs. State of Mississippi* (1961), transcript, 78-97, 141-154, 155-185, 12, 129-134.

that request, Roberts muttered several different days before settling on Saturday night. Finch, trying to fix the error, stated, “Now, Johnny Lee . . . was it about a week before you went in on Sunday?” Roberts continued to insist that he met with Kennard on Saturday night, and Finch persistently tried to correct him. The defense objected. Still, Finch led Roberts to finally settle on Thursday. Throughout his testimony, Roberts choked back sobs and bit back tears because he harbored intense guilt over participating in the false conviction of his friend.⁵¹

On cross-examination, Brown impeached the prosecution’s case. The feed sacks weighed 100 pounds and were cumbersome; Roberts could never have moved the sacks quickly without help. Roberts claimed that he entered the warehouse at 4:40 a.m. but as he lacked a flashlight, he could not have read his watch in the dark. Since Kennard had never worked nor visited the co-op warehouse, he had no knowledge about the kind of locks, and therefore could not have planned the break-in as Roberts claimed. When Kennard took the stand and denied the charges against him, Finch asked why Roberts would lie. Kennard replied “some person probably influenced him to do it.” Finch asked him to whom he referred. Kennard replied he “had no idea.” When Finch asked, “Do you think I would?” Kennard again replied “I have no idea.” After deliberating for 10 minutes, the all-white jury found Kennard guilty, and Judge Hall sentenced Kennard to seven years in the state penitentiary.⁵²

⁵¹ Quoting *Kennard v. Mississippi* (1961), transcript, 209. *Ibid.*, 205-221; Memo for clemency of Kennard, Pardon Docket No. 06-0005, 22, Tougaloo Collection, MDAH.

⁵² Quoting *Kennard v. Mississippi* (1961), transcript, 353. *Ibid.*, 221-247; 252-254; 265-297; 331-355; “Kennard Convicted, Sentenced to Seven Years,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 24, 1960; Hollander, “How Mississippi Southern Stayed White,” 286; Douglass Starr, “Kennard Burglary Conviction Upheld,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 3, 1961; “Kennard Convicted, Sentenced to Seven Years,” *Hattiesburg American*,

The judgment enraged Medgar Evers who watched the trial from the balcony. Later that day, he publicly lambasted the verdict as “the greatest mockery to justice.” The evidence, he insisted, proved Kennard’s innocence, but “in a court room of segregationists apparently resolved to put Kennard ‘legally away,’ the all-white jury found Kennard guilty as charged in only 10 minutes.” Infuriated by the black leader’s criticism, Finch had Evers arrested on charges of contempt, on the grounds that he had tried to hinder justice with unfounded remarks. In defense of his client, Evers’ lawyer reminded Mississippians that white southerners condemned the *Brown* decision, and yet, Mississippi authorities had never found any of those men in contempt of court. On December 2, Judge Hall found Evers guilty, sentenced him to jail for 30 days, and fined him \$100. In July 1961, however, the Mississippi State Supreme Court reversed the verdict. Although the justices characterized Evers’ remarks as unprovoked, they conceded that he had the constitutional right of free speech.⁵³

Kennard was not so lucky. On April 3, 1961, Kennard lost his appeal when the Mississippi Supreme Court denied a motion to quash the indictment despite the state’s unconstitutional methods of excluding blacks from the jury. On October 9, the U. S. Supreme Court justices refused to hear the appeal. Meanwhile, the circuit court rewarded

November 24, 1960.

⁵³ Quoting “Kennard Convicted, Sentenced to Seven Years,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 24, 1960. Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, December 20, 1960, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, NAACP Papers; “NAACP Official Faces Contempt Citation Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 26, 1960; *State of Mississippi v. Medgar Evers* (1960), case no. 4966, *Forrest County: Minute Books Circuit Court*, vol. 21, 34, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; NAACP Press Release, “Lawyers Work on Appeal of Mississippi NAACP Aide in Contempt Case,” December 15, 1960, SCR #s2-72-1-72-2-1-1 to 3-1-1-1, MDAH; Elliott Chaze, “NAACP Man Found Guilty of Contempt,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 2, 1960; Bob Pittman, “Evers Is Cleared in Contempt Case,” *Daily News*, June 12, 1961, SCR #10-28-0-14-1-1-1, MDAH.

Roberts for his lies that helped the state destroy Kennard. After sentencing Roberts to five years in prison, Judge Hall suspended his jail time in favor of probation on the condition of good behavior, a stipulation Roberts quickly violated. He committed a series of assaults and thefts, but police ignored his transgressions. Two years after the trial, Roberts informed NAACP member Raylawni Branch that powerful whites forced him to falsely implicate Kennard. When she implored him to recant his testimony, he refused because they had threatened to harm his family.⁵⁴ The white patriarchs had succeeded in removing Kennard, but they failed to crush the spirit of resistance that Kennard invoked. While he languished in prison on trumped up charges for his treason to the racial order, Kennard's comrades in the NAACP continued to target the other great bulwark of Jim Crow—black disfranchisement.

For over a decade, the Forrest County NAACP had kept meticulous records of the county's refusal to register black voters, collecting affidavits from blacks who had unsuccessfully attempted to register under Lynd and Cox. Based upon these records, in August 1960, a month before authorities arrested Kennard, the Department of Justice, under Title III of the new Civil Rights Act, which empowered the federal government to intervene in voter discrimination cases, officially requested that Lynd make available his records. Lynd refused. On January 19, 1961, the Department of Justice filed an enforcement proceeding in the U. S. Southern District Court. Judge Harold Cox refused

⁵⁴ Ronald Hollander, "How Mississippi Southern Stayed White," 286; Elliott Chaze, "NAACP Man Found Guilty of Contempt," *Hattiesburg American*, December 2, 1960; Douglass Starr, "Kennard Burglary Conviction Upheld," *Hattiesburg American*, April 3, 1961; "Kennard Denied Hearing by U.S. Supreme Court," *Hattiesburg American*, October 9, 1961; *State of Mississippi v. Clyde Kennard and Johnnie Lee Roberts* (1960), case no. 124/5833 and 5834, *Forrest County: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 24, 16; Elliott Chaze, "NAACP Man Found Guilty of Contempt," *Hattiesburg American*, December 2, 1960.

to grant the motion and sought to frustrate government efforts by delaying proceedings against Lynd. On July 6, 1961, Department of Justice attorneys John Doar and Robert Owens filed a federal suit against Lynd that accused him of discriminating against black voters by arbitrarily rejecting qualified black applicants, by delaying their registration, and by applying lower grading and processing standards when evaluating white applicants. Over the next eight months, they summoned several black and white witnesses to testify.⁵⁵

In March 1962, the U. S. Southern District Court heard the first part of the case against Lynd in Jackson. With great trepidation, NAACP member Earline Boyd congregated inside the basement of the federal courthouse with the other witnesses. The idea of accusing Lynd of a federal crime in a courthouse full of powerful white men devoted to the racial order terrified her. As Boyd glanced nervously around the room, she noticed that all of the black witness wore their Sunday best while the whites appeared “raggedy, dirty” many of them wearing “flip-flap shoes.” She recognized some of the whites—“the fish lady” and the cookie lady, as blacks called them because they sold their foods in black neighborhoods. The discrepancy was striking. In court, Doar presented affidavits from 63 African Americans, including Dahmer, and he brought a series of black witnesses to the stand to prove that Lynd and his deputies discriminated against black voters. Their testimony revealed that Lynd flunked several highly-educated blacks

⁵⁵ Medgar Evers, Mississippi NAACP Monthly Report, January 20, 1961, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 15, NAACP Papers; *United States v. Lynd* (1962), case no. 1646, records, 8, 33; *United States v. Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County, State of Mississippi*, 301 F.2d 818 (5th Cir. 1962), in Roy L. Brooks, Gilbert Paul Carrasco, Gordon A. Martin, Jr., *Civil Rights Litigation: Cases and Perspectives* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, Second Printing, 1995). 520-21 [hereinafter cited as *US v. Lynd*, 1962, *Civil Rights Litigation*]; Steven Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University, 1976), 273; Dittmer, *Local People*, 180.

on the registration exam, including Reverend James Chandler, who held a master's in theology, Robert Lewis, a chemistry and physics teacher, Jessie Stegal, a school principal, and Addie Burger, a teacher and wife of Principal N. R. Burger. To prove that Lynd discriminated against these citizens because of their race, Doar presented to the court the 17 disheveled white witnesses whom Lynd had registered. Most of them were illiterate and had either never attended school or only completed a few grades. Several of these witnesses admitted that white clerks filled out their applications and exams for them, or at least, helped them. When Doar read these witnesses the questions from the registration qualifying exam, many of them could not provide a single correct answer.⁵⁶

When the Department of Justice rested its case, Theron Lynd took the stand and lied. He claimed that he judged black and white registration applicants equally, using the same qualifying standards regardless of race. Yet he admitted that he had only registered two blacks—both of whom had their registration transferred from other counties. He also conceded that he told his deputies—all of them white women—that they should refer all “Negro” applicants to him because “the girls didn’t want to talk to the Negroes and I wasn’t going to force them.” The defense infused its case with the black beast subtext when attorneys brought two attractive white women to the stand to describe blacks who had tried to register as evincing either dangerous or sexual behavior toward them. One such deputy, Wilma Waley, described by the *Hattiesburg American* as “shapely,” testified that she simply refused to communicate with “Negro[e]s,” because she had

⁵⁶ Quoting Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton; Ben McCarty, “Former Deputy Clerk Testifies,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 6, 1962; *United States v. Lynd*, case no. 1646 (1962), A-1-60, United States v. Lynd Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Lynd Collection]; Dittmer, *Local People*, 181-184; Curtis Hayes, Report on Forrest County, March - September, 1962, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; *US v. Lynd*, 1962, *Civil Rights Litigation*, 520-523.

experienced two frightening encounters with blacks. Once, a black woman entered the office, fumbled in her purse, and returned with a “large Negro man.” Intimidated, she contacted the sheriff. On another occasion, “a Negro man” asked her personal questions. Waley claimed, “he looked like he wanted to be friendly—too friendly to suit me.” Toward the end of the trial, Judge Cox blatantly informed Doar: “You don’t know how the Negro people are here. You people up North don’t know what Lynd was talking about, but I do. The girls didn’t want to be associated with that kind of influence.” When the defense received a 30 day recess to prepare its response to the complaint, Doar requested a temporary injunction ordering Lynd to cease his discriminatory practices. Judge Cox refused. Doar appealed.⁵⁷

On April 10, 1962, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals granted the temporary injunction and ordered Lynd to immediately register qualified applicants. The decision, though a landmark in the history of voting cases in Mississippi, failed to produce a watershed affect because Lynd neglected to comply with the order. On the Saturday following the issuance of the injunction, Lynd refused to register two black applicants, and he only registered one black person of the many who visited his office in the next two weeks. In late April, the Department of Justice asked the Fifth Circuit to find Lynd in contempt and enforce the injunction. While the case remained pending for the next year, 10 blacks, including Dahmer, filed affidavits against Lynd for failing to comply with the court order and register them. Dahmer, however, had grown tired of waiting through the

⁵⁷ First and second quotes, Ben McCarty, “Lynd Testifies in Vote Suit,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 1962; third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh quotes, Ben McCarty, “Former Deputy Clerk Testifies,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 6, 1962; last quote, Ben McCarty, “Recessed Voting Suit Will Move Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 1962. *United States v. Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County, State of Mississippi*, 301 F.2d 818 (5th Cir. 1962), in *Civil Rights Litigation*, 522.

long and seemingly ineffective judicial process. As he also became increasingly frustrated with the failure of the Forrest County NAACP to launch a full-scale Movement, he looked outside for answers.⁵⁸

Dahmer and other black Mississippians watched with envy the burgeoning Movement in Jackson and in neighboring southern states. Between 1961 and 1962, the veteran group CORE and the new organizations SNCC and COFO breathed life into the stagnating struggle. SNCC emerged in 1960 after four black college students staged a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in North Carolina and ignited a chain reaction as students across the South launched sit-in movements. SNCC also joined CORE in the 1961 Freedom Rides in which integrated groups of riders protested segregation in interstate travel by sitting together on buses and integrating bus stations across the South. For their transgressions, white mobs, Klansmen, and police beat them; and upon their arrival in Jackson, Mississippi's new governor, Ross Barnett ensured their arrest, conviction, and imprisonment in Parchman. Nevertheless, he failed to vanquish the rising Mississippi Movement. The riders had arrived at the den of Leviathan and although battered, they survived and refused to retreat. To unify the many groups moving into Mississippi with each other and with the state's NAACP branches and various local groups, leaders formed the Conference of Federated Organizations (COFO). Soon COFO, however, became its own force rather than simply an umbrella organization. COFO, CORE, and SNCC established a strong presence in Mississippi by sending small cabals across the

⁵⁸ "Injunction Issued in Voter Registration Case," *Hattiesburg American*, April 12, 1962; "Voter suit: Appeal is likely," *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 1962; *United States v. Lynd* (1962), case no. 1646, records, for basis of appeal, see, 34-36, for evidence in the case, see, 60-150, Lynd Collection; "Contempt Hearings Today: Lynd Reports one Negro Registered, Others Nixed," *Hattiesburg American*, April 30, 1962; "Voting Registration: New Order Issued in Lynd Case," *Hattiesburg American*, Apr 18, 1962; Lee Cole to file, n. d., SCR #4-7-0-9-1-1, MDAH; Dittmer, *Local People*, 179-182.

state to organize local leadership and to establish civil rights beachheads.⁵⁹

Dahmer looked to the young radicals with great hope, and he invited them to Forrest County to mobilize the community. Recent Harvard graduate and SNCC and COFO staff member, Robert Moses, had tried to develop a beachhead in McComb, located 75 miles west of Hattiesburg. Although Moses managed to recruit several activists including two devoted young black men—Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes—massive resistance, including a racial murder, decimated SNCC's efforts in the area. SNCC needed a new launching point, and the Lynd case attracted SNCC's attention to Forrest County as it provided the Mississippi Movement with the ideal opportunity to publicize black disfranchisement. The invitation from Dahmer, the well-liked local NAACP man, also bolstered SNCC's hope. Moses sent Watkins and Hayes to Dahmer, who provided them with shelter, food, and all his connections in the area. J. B. and L. E. Woods offered the first floor of their hotel in Hattiesburg as a COFO/SNCC office, and Reverend L. P. Ponder opened St. John's Church in Palmer's Crossing for recruitment. During the first recruitment meeting, Watkins and Hayes shared with the few attendees their mission to change black life in Mississippi. They had come to Hattiesburg, they said, in search of people willing to fight for the liberties the constitution promised them. They asked for volunteers to join them in their crusade and take the first step onto the battlefield by journeying to Lynd's office to register.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, Third Printing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991 edition), 9-54; Dittmer, *Local People*, 103-119; William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Liberties: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 71-86; 9-44; Dewey E. Grantham, *The South in Modern America*, 230; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1989), 413-470; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 107-108.

When six people—Reverend Ponder, Reverend J. W. Brown, Virgie Robinson, Victoria Jackson, John Henry, and Bennie Hines—raised their hands, Hayes and Watkins led them to the courthouse. Lynd treated them with great disdain, refused to answer any of their questions, and failed them all on the registration exam. The city fathers also hoped to swiftly quash the activist spirit with economic reprisals. Hines, Brown, and Henry worked as school bus drivers, and 24 hours after they attempted to register, the city fired them. As the registration campaign progressed, the Sovereignty Commission worked with Lynd, as well as Forrest County Superintendent of Education Milton Evans, to investigate blacks who attempted to vote and reported findings to Governor Ross Barnett. The commission also contacted Reverend Woullard, the black informant who had helped them in the Kennard case and who the commission characterized as “trusted by the white citizens of Hattiesburg,” to gather intelligence for them on local activism.⁶¹

Watkins and Hayes sensed the dangers in Forrest County, and Watkins found it more frightening than McComb. Hayes characterized Hattiesburg as the real beginning for him and Watkins in the Movement, later recalling; “it was somewhat amazing how the people accepted us two little children trying to do a man’s job.” Within six months,

⁶⁰ Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, speech, Studies in Civil Rights Course, October 10, 2000, audiotape 1, Victoria Gray Adams Papers, McCain, USM; Dittmer, *Local People*, 99-115, 179-182; COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs*, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Hollis Watkins, interview by John Rachal, October 23, 1996, MOHP Digital; Cathi Carr, “Fire Destroys Historic Hotel; Memories Won’t Die,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 18, 1998, Woods Guest House/Hattiesburg COFO Headquarters Collection, McCain, USM; Sandra Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” Plenary at Walden University Academic Resident, Radisson Metrodome, Minneapolis, September 14, 1998, 17, Sandra Adickes Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Adickes Papers].

⁶¹ Curtis Hayes, Forrest County Report, March - September, 1962, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Albert Jones to Theron C. Lynd, April 16, 1962, SCR #2-64-1-23-1-1-1; Albert Jones to Ross R. Barnett, April 27, 1962, SCR #2-64-1-18-1-1-1; Milton Evans to Albert Jones, April 19, 1962, SCR #2-64-1-24-2-1-1, MDAH.

Hayes and Watkins, by traveling house to house in Forrest County, had recruited approximately 20 students and 20 adults as full-time activists. During the summer of 1962, they organized the Forrest Voters League which provided voter-registration classes, facilitated registration drives, and reported registration results to the Department of Justice. By September, Lynd had only registered four of the 100 black citizens whom Hayes and Watkins had brought to his office. Still, the struggle grew, albeit slowly. Watkins was particularly impressed that so many black professionals with much to lose willingly joined in the effort to register. Victoria Jackson, a local owner of a cosmetics company, soon became president of the Forrest County Voters League. In September, Watkins and Hayes, having cultivated a base of indigenous leaders in Forrest County, left to help organize the Delta, leaving the future of the Hattiesburg Movement in the hands of people like Jackson. After their departure, Jackson became the local COFO project director, and she focused much of her early efforts on voter education and registration activities. She hosted literacy and citizenship courses in her church and in people's homes and often recruited people to the Movement by teaching them to read.⁶²

During 1962, Jones County also experienced an influx of COFO, SNCC, and CORE activists. Moses sent Lester McKinnie, a veteran of the Nashville sit-ins, founder of SNCC's Jackson Movement, and one of the freedom riders arrested in Jackson, to organize Laurel. McKinnie found Laurel a difficult town to penetrate. Sovereignty Commission Investigator Lee Cole, District Attorney Pershing Sullivan, and the Assistant

⁶² Quoting Curtis Hayes, Forrest County Report, March - September, 1962, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers. Hollis Watkins, interview by John Rachal, October 23, 1996, MOHP Digital; Dittmer, *Local People*, 181-184; Sandra Adickes, "The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools," 16, Adickes Papers; Speech by Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, Studies in Civil Rights Course, October 10, 2000, audiotape 1, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams Papers.

Chief of Police Grady Nix targeted McKinnie. Nix promptly arrested McKinnie when he tried to desegregate the restaurant at the local bus station, and the judge sentenced him to four months in jail. Nix and Hopkins tried to ensure that McKinnie was suspended permanently from his college in Nashville. McKinnie also confronted opposition from Dr. Murph, who tried to sustain control over the local struggle. Although Murph respected SNCC and the workers from CORE and COFO, he feared that they would threaten the struggle with their radical approach. He often sent them to Hattiesburg where the local NAACP was more open. Yet many COFO organizers and their recruits remained in Laurel, and eventually the groups cooperated. Activists like Bertie Mae McGill, a maid in Jones County living in the KC Bottom, became one of the first crossover recruits.⁶³

The NAACP remained a significant force in Laurel, particularly its youth council. By November 1961, its members met once a week at the First Allen Chapel, AME Church. When they launched a black boycott of the segregated Jackson State Fair, not a single black person from Laurel attended. The council had more experience with the Movement across the South than most children in the state because the youth council choir, directed by youth leader Lula Cooley, traveled the nation with Dr. Murph,

⁶³ Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002 edition), 81; Task Force: Freedom, November 13, 1962, vol. 132, Reel 26, Congress of Racial Equality Archives, Papers, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter as CORE Papers]; Second Report Special Committee On Strategy Concerned with Expanded CORE Program, March 28, 1962, Pt. 20, Reel 13, NAACP Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 116, 179. Arrest Record for Lester McKinnie, SCR #2-55-3-69-2-1-1; "Negro is Fined in Breach Case," n. d., SCR #2-49-0-37-1-1-1; A. L. Hopkins, Report on Lester McKinnie, May 29, 1962, SCR # 2-49-0-26-1-1-1; A. L. Hopkins, MSSC Report, June 19, 1962, SCR #, 2-49-0-44-1-1-1; A. L. Hopkins to L. C. Nix, May 22, 1962, SCR #1-70-0-14-1-1-1; A. L. Hopkins to Chief L. C. Nix, May 22, 1962, SCR #, 1-70-0-14-1-1-1; MSSC Report, SCR #, 2-150-1-3-1-1-1, n. d., all at MDAH; Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, MOHP recording.

performing for Catholic Churches and for NAACP banquets across the country. When the choir performed in Birmingham, the teenagers joined the demonstrations there. Cooley never forgot the horrifying sights of the angry police and their dogs, nor the fire hoses that “looked like it would tear your skin.” Back in Laurel, however, Murph was more cautious with the children as he considered the town too dangerous for direct-action protest, but the time was coming, and the children were ready.⁶⁴ During 1962 and 1963, the Laurel and Hattiesburg struggles had not yet exploded into a full-scale revolt like in Jackson or even in Greenwood. Rather, both towns experienced an era of mobilization as the indigenous groups slowly morphed with the more radical organizations in the final years of the reformation and as leaders prepared the ground for the revolution on the horizon.

The mobilization centered, in part, on one of the key figures of the Hattiesburg reformation, Clyde Kennard, who once again became the eye of the gathering racial storm in Mississippi. During the summer of 1961, Kennard rapidly lost weight and suffered acute abdominal pain. Doctors misdiagnosed him with sickle cell anemia. In early 1962, when James Meredith’s campaign to integrate the University of Mississippi began to gain momentum, the white establishment took their rage out on Kennard. Prison authorities removed him from the hospital and sent him back to hard labor in Parchman where they placed him on the harshest detail—“the sunup to sundown gang.” Despite Kennard’s ill health, he worked hard in the fields six days a week. On Sundays, he wrote letters for illiterate inmates and taught literacy classes. In the hours he was confined to his cell, he read classic books sent to him by Rabbi Mantinband. In early 1962, when

⁶⁴ Quoting Lula Cooley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2010, MOHP recording. B. E. Murph, Activities of Laurel Youth Council for 1961, November 14, 1961, Pt. 20, Reel 13, NAACP Papers.

Kennard began to hemorrhage, a sympathetic doctor, Haynes Helep, examined him. Kennard had stomach cancer. After removing Kennard's sizeable tumor, the doctor requested that Parchman Superintendent C. E. Brezeale seek parole for Kennard. Brezeale refused. In June Kennard's new doctor, M. L. Dalton, removed a tumor from his colon and informed authorities that Kennard had a 20 percent chance of living five years. Dalton asked Governor Barnett to parole Kennard for necessary medical treatment. Barnett refused. Authorities forced Kennard into the fields each day, ignoring the intense pain he experienced as the cancer spread. Under strict orders from Brezeale, the guards refused him medical treatment. Kennard became so weak that other prisoners had to carry him to and from the fields to work.⁶⁵

Finally, when President John F. Kennedy ordered the University of Mississippi to admit Meredith, the *Mississippi Free Press* reminded its readers that Kennard was still languishing in Parchman prison for attempting the same goal at MSC. That September, Governor Barnett and Lieutenant Governor Paul B. Johnson—a son of Hattiesburg—mobilized against the Kennedys. In response, Kennedy federalized the National Guard, and despite a riot that killed two people, Meredith desegregated the University of Mississippi. In the wake of Meredith's triumph, the NAACP, SNCC, and the *Mississippi*

⁶⁵ Memo for Kennard Clemency, Pardon Docket No. 06-0005, 2, Tougaloo Collection, MDAH; Tom Dent, "Portrait of Three Heroes," *Freedomways*, 5 (Spring 1965): 257; Bradford Daniel Huie and John Howard Griffin, "Why They Can't Wait," *The Progressive*, 28 (July 1964): 18-19; Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," *The Quiet Voices*, 221-222. Haynes Heslep to Fred Jones, March 10, 1962; Fred Jones to Ross Barnett, March 12, 1962; Ross Barnett to Fred Jones, March 13, 1962; M. L. Dalton to C. E. Brezeale, June 21, 1962; M. L. Dalton to C. E. Brezeale, June 21, 1961; C. E. Brezeale to Ross Barnett, June 25, 1962; Ross Barnett to C. E. Brezeale, June 26, 1962, all in RG 27, Ross Barnett, MDAH. "Clyde Kennard Dying of Cancer; Charge Refusal of Medical Care," *Mississippi Free Press*, January 26, 1963; Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 261-318.

Free Press initiated the Free Kennard campaign. On the legal front, NAACP retained lawyer, R. Jess Brown, demanded that the Mississippi Supreme Court overturn Kennard's conviction on the grounds that Lynd's refusal to register black voters prevented blacks from serving on jury pools, which in turn denied Kennard his right to a jury of his peers. In January the justices rejected his motion, claiming Brown had failed to prove juror discrimination. Brown appealed and petitioned the Mississippi Supreme Court to release Kennard to the hospital since Brezeale had denied Kennard medical treatment. Meanwhile, the *Mississippi Free Press* denounced Mississippi authorities as "completely inhuman" for refusing to provide Kennard with adequate care, and beseeched its readers to "add their voices to a nation-wide chorus demanding justice for Clyde Kennard." Former Forrest County residents, Dorie and Joyce Ladner, both SNCC and NAACP activists attending Tougaloo College, led their student body in a national campaign that included mass circulation of petitions demanding that President John Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy release Kennard.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Quoting Editorial, "We Speak In Sorrow," *Mississippi Free Press*, January 26, 1963. Ross Barnett to James Meredith, September 7, 1962, Segregation Files, George McIlheny Papers, Mitchell, MSU; Dittmer, *Local People*, 138-141; "Star for Paul," *Hattiesburg American*, August 16, 1963; "Kennard in Prison, Far From Ole Miss," *Mississippi Free Press*, July 28, 1962. "History of Clyde Kennard," series in *Mississippi Free Press*, August 4, 1962, August 11, 1962, August 18, 1962, September 1, 1962, September 8, 1962, September 15, 1962, and September 22, 1962. "Appeal Seeks To Liberate Kennard," *Mississippi Free Press*, December 1, 1962; "Kennard Told To Appeal To State Supreme Court," *Mississippi Free Press*, December 15, 1962; "Kennard Appeals to Federal Court; State Supreme Court Rejects Plea," *Mississippi Free Press*, January 19, 1963; "Clyde Kennard Dying of Cancer; Charge Refusal of Medical Care," *Mississippi Free Press*, January 26, 1963; "Miss. Students Seek Justice for Kennard," *Mississippi Free Press*, December 22, 1962; Editorial, "Remember Clyde Kennard," *Mississippi Free Press*, December 29, 1962; "Plea for Kennard's Freedom Filed with State Supreme Court," *Mississippi Free Press*, January 5, 1963; "Campaign to Free a Forgotten Man," *The Southern Patriot*, n. d., SCR # 13-59-0-26-4-1-1-1, MDAH; "Miss. High Court Rejects Plea of Student In Chicken Feed Case," *Daily Defender*, January 15, 1963. Dorie Ladner Churnet, interviewer anonymous, n. d.; Joyce Ladner, interview by

In January, Kennard began to hemorrhage again. When the prisoners arrived to carry Kennard to the fields, he could barely move. Authorities begrudgingly transported him to the prison doctor. During transit the guard warned him, “Damn you, if you mess up this car, I’ll kick you out.” When they arrived at the doctor’s office, the guard dumped Kennard in the waiting room. Kennard took two steps and fell on the floor and then crawled on his stomach to the doctor’s room. The unsympathetic doctor knew his sister had brought him food during her visitation the previous day, and he informed Kennard that he suspected she had slipped pills to him to make him ill so he could avoid a day of hard labor. Kennard begged the doctor to examine him to determine the truth. The physician reluctantly complied and quickly realized that Kennard was near death. When Kennard’s supporters learned of the incident, famous activists including Martin Luther King, Jr., Dick Gregory, and John Howard Griffin warned Governor Barnett that if he allowed Kennard to perish in prison, they would accuse him of murder.⁶⁷

Concerned about the negative national publicity, on January 23, 1963, Governor Barnett ordered Kennard transported to the emergency room for immediate treatment. The night before Kennard’s release, the black prisoners held a prayer meeting for him, though Kennard advised them against it as such meetings defied prison rules, and he worried that the officials would whip participants. Undaunted, the prisoners “sang and sang, and the guards took names and names.” To stem the bad publicity emanating from the case, Governor Barnett lied to the public as he claimed that he had only recently learned of Kennard’s illness. Of course, a year earlier he had refused Kennard’s request

Barbara Ransby, March 23, 1990, both in Joyce Ladner Papers, Tougaloo Collection, MDAH.

⁶⁷ Bradford Daniel Huie and John Howard Griffin, “Why They Can’t Wait,” 19.

to release him from prison so he could receive the necessary medical treatment for his stomach cancer. In early 1963, Brown requested that Barnett pardon Kennard since he had served three years and two months in Parchman which he argued “far exceed the statutory requirement to make him eligible for parole”; besides, Kennard was a model prisoner. Barnett refused. Instead, he indefinitely suspended his sentence, “dependent upon his future good behavior.” Although the bad publicity of the Mississippi justice system had, at the least, forced Governor Barnett to suspend Kennard’s sentence and release him to the hospital, the decision came too late.⁶⁸

The cancer spread so quickly. When John Howard Griffin visited Kennard, he was stunned to find that he had become “a tiny little dwarf. He lay with a sheet covering his face so no one could see the grimace of pain on his face.” Despite the unconscionable treatment of Kennard by the state and the series of injustices he had suffered, he told Griffin that he would consider his suffering worthwhile if it “would show this country where racism finally leads . . . but the people aren’t going to know it, are they?” When Griffin promised him he would tell them in every public appearance he made, Kennard declared that the racist society that warped the conscience of men like the guard who dumped him at the doctor’s office proved far worse than its oppressive impact on him. Tell them, Kennard implored, that “this system has turned him into a beast, and it will turn his children into beasts.” Even though Kennard lay dying, he had yet to lose hope for

⁶⁸ First quote, Tom Dent, “Portrait of Three Heroes,” *Freedomways*, 258; second quote, Jess R. Brown to Ross Barnett, January 26, 1963; third quote, Order for Indefinite Suspension of Clyde Kennard, January 28, 1963; and Ross Barnett to C. E. Brezeale, January 23, 1962, all in RG 27: Ross Barnett, MDAH. Dittmer, *Local People*, 83; Myrlie Evers, *For Us, The Living* (Jackson: Barner Books, University Press of Mississippi, 1967), 224-225; Huie and Griffin, “Why They Can’t Wait,” 19; “Kennard Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 30, 1963; “Victory by Protest,” *The Southern Patriot*, vol. 21 (February 1963), SCR # 13-59-0-27-1-1-1, MDAH; William Banks Taylor, *Down in Parchman Farm* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 2, 60-62, 180.

his own life or for the lives of all blacks. He asserted that if he survived his illness, he would seek a degree in constitutional law and work for black rights in Mississippi.⁶⁹

Kennard's suffering inspired John Frazier, a sophomore at J. P. Campbell College in Jackson, to carry on the crusade to desegregate the local college in Hattiesburg, by then renamed the University of Southern Mississippi. In February of 1963, he sent his application to the administration. Frazier, at 21-years-old, already possessed a history of civil rights activism in the state, participating in sit-ins and Freedom Rides, and serving as president of the NAACP State Youth Council. Frazier had suffered arrests and beatings for his activities, but white society failed to intimidate him. The administration denied his application, claiming he had missed the deadline to turn in all necessary components. On March 15, Frazier announced that the NAACP promised to provide him whatever aid he needed to achieve acceptance. As summer approached, civil rights activists looked to the federal government with great hope.⁷⁰

June 1963 seemed to offer Mississippi blacks great hope, but it soon fell into a time of great tragedy. On June 11, President Kennedy called for the U. S. Congress to pass a civil rights bill ending segregation in public accommodations and schools. In a special address to the nation, he spoke eloquently about the undemocratic character of American racism when he declared: "We preach freedom around the world . . . and we cherish our freedom here at home; but are we to say to the world, and, much more

⁶⁹ Quoting Huie and Griffin, "Why They Can't Wait," 19; "Kennard Is Free," *Mississippi Free Press*, February 2, 1963.

⁷⁰ "Frazier Sets No Date for USM Mix Attempt," *Hattiesburg American*, March 15, 1963; John Frazier, Application to the University of Southern Mississippi, SCR #1-70-0-20-1-1-1 through 3-1-1; "Southern Next For Mixing?" SCR #1-70-0-16-1-1-1; SCR Memo, December 7, 1962, John Frazier SCR #2-55-10-27-1-1-1 through 2-1-1; "Attending Federal Court, Jackson – NAACP vs. The City of Jackson, Trailways," August 8, 1961, SCR #1-70-1-11-1-1-1 to 3-1-1, all at MDAH.

importantly for each other, that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no class or caste system, no ghettos, no master race, except with the respect to Negroes.” Hours after the President’s speech, a member of the White Citizens Council, Byron de la Beckwith shot and killed Medgar Evers in his driveway in Jackson. Evers’ murder devastated blacks throughout Mississippi. He was their Dr. King, their Malcolm X, and now he was gone. Less than a month later, on Independence Day, Kennard died. The Central Piney Woods blacks mourned the man who stood at the forefront of their Movement. Two great giants in the Mississippi Movement were dead. P. D. East produced one of the most touching memorials to Kennard. Beneath the headline, “An Editorial in Three Words,” he placed a photograph of a black woman with a devastated expression on her haunted face and a broken look in her eyes; underneath he simply wrote, “Clyde Kennard’s Mother.” The tragedies seemed unending to blacks in the summer of 1963.⁷¹

Throughout most of 1963, the Mississippi Movement slammed against a wall of massive resistance. The police state had survived the onslaught of the Freedom Rides, the forced desegregation of the University of Mississippi, the murder of Medgar Evers, and the false and cruel imprisonment that ultimately killed Kennard. The white crackdown had already worn down one white reformer, Charles Mantsband, who left Mississippi in February. It seemed the white tyranny would even defeat the first massive civil rights legislation moving through congress. Governor Barnett, Congressman Colmer, and local

⁷¹ First quote, John F. Kennedy, speech, June 11, 1963, American Experience, The Presidents, John F. Kennedy, PBS, website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/35_kennedy/psources/ps_civilrights.html (accessed June 2004); all other quotes, P. D. East, “An Editorial in Three Words,” *Petal Paper*, July 1963. “Clyde Kennard Dies in Chicago Hospital,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 5, 1963; Myrlie Evers, *For Us, The Living*, 299-304.

newspapers claimed the bill's passage would lead to a black revolution and a communist takeover, and they labeled it the Civil Wrongs Bill. Similar rhetoric also pervaded the gubernatorial campaign. Hattiesburg's own Paul B. Johnson, Jr. launched his campaign for the governorship in Forrest County, and he rode his stand against Meredith at the University of Mississippi to the governor's mansion. When he opened an office in Hattiesburg in July, Citizens Council leader Dudley Connor introduced him as a man who "showed his personal courage against the armed might of the greatest nation on earth." Johnson actively sought the support of the councils during his campaign, arguing that neither a leader nor his army could emerge victorious without the unwavering commitment of the citizens in the face of federal invasion. He praised the Citizens Council as a great bulwark against the enemy.⁷²

Some encouraging developments on the national level, however, infused life back into the stagnated activism in Jones and Forrest Counties. The Department of Justice moved deeper into Mississippi that summer to investigate voter discrimination. In July, federal lawyers began penetrating Jones County when they filed and won a lawsuit in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordering the circuit clerk of Jones County, Leonard Caves, to present voter records for examination. Although Caves employed stalling tactics to

⁷² Quoting, "Johnson Opens Office Here," *Hattiesburg American*, July 13, 1963. Dittmer, *Local People*, 199; Bob Moses to SNCC Executive Committee, n. d., Ser. [?], Reel 40; "What is COFO: Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations," COFO Publication, vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers; Statement by Governor Ross R. Barnett before Senate Commerce Committee, July 12, 1963, John C. Stennis Collection, Mitchell, MSU. Correspondence between William Colmer and Hattiesburg Board of Realtors, October 1, 1963; William D. Carmichael of Merchants and Manufacturing Bank Ellisville, September 17 & 20, 1963; Resolution of Mississippi State Junior Chamber of Commerce, n. d., and various letters from constituents in Jones and Forrest Counties from June 1963 - June 1964, all in Colmer Papers. "Rights Crisis," *Hattiesburg American*, June 14, 1963; "Johnson Kicks-off Campaign," *Hattiesburg American*, June 17, 1963; Paul B. Johnson, speech, Jackson Citizens Council, May 17, 1963, Subseries IV, PBJ Papers; Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," 228-229.

avoid compliance, the Department of Justice established its first beachhead in Laurel with the lawsuit and battled Caves for many years. Simultaneously, the Department of Justice achieved greater success in Forrest County: on July 15, 1963, the Fifth Circuit Court gave Lynd 10 days to register 43 black citizens whose applications the court approved, to provide blacks and whites the same sections of the Mississippi Constitution for interpretation, to cease rejecting black applicants on the basis of minor errors, to permit federal agents to review all of his registration records, and to present the court with a written and signed statement swearing he would adhere to the court's ruling. If Lynd failed to comply, the U. S. Attorney General would take him into custody. Lynd filed the ordered statement, but with an addendum contending it could not interfere with his right of appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court. While the appeal remained pending, Lynd continued to discriminate. In August 1963, 10 of the 43 qualified Forrest County applicants sent affidavits to the court swearing that Lynd had still refused to include their names on the voting rolls.⁷³

Despite Lynd's persistent intransigence, the case provided activists with hope once again. Lynd became the first registrar in the South to suffer a conviction of voter discrimination under the 1960 Civil Rights Act—a landmark SNCC capitalized upon by seeking to launch the Hattiesburg Movement onto center stage. In the late summer of 1963, SNCC and COFO sent veteran activists John O'Neal, Lawrence Guyot, and Carl

⁷³ U.S. To Inspect Caves' Records, *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 17, 1963; Roy Bain, "Caves Says Can't Show Books Now," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 18, 1963; Odell McRae, "Caves Loses Out in High Court," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 20, 1963; "Caves Case Stalemated," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 24, 1965; "U. S. Justice Agents To Return August 8," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 1, 1963; "Caves Is Given Delay In Registration Probe," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 8, 1963; *United States v. Lynd* (1962), case no. 1646, records 36-38, McCain, USM; "Lynd is Convicted of Civil Contempt," *Hattiesburg American*, July 15, 1963; Fact Sheet: Hattiesburg, Mississippi, n.d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers.

Arnold to Hattiesburg where they cooperated with the local NAACP to launch a wide-spread voter-registration project. The Hattiesburg office came alive with activity. A constant flow of local people willing to make the trip downtown and attempt to register moved through the SNCC/COFO office. Black businessmen allowed SNCC to display Movement literature and announcements in their buildings. That fall, COFO leaders launched the Freedom Vote campaign across the state—a parallel unofficial election in which COFO ran candidates on civil rights platforms. They hoped the mock election would reveal that blacks would vote if the establishment stopped hampering their efforts through discrimination and violence. Aaron Henry, Chairman of COFO, State President of the NAACP, and member of the board of Directors of SCLC, ran for governor; and Reverend Edwin King—a white activist and the Dean of Students and Chaplain at Tougaloo—ran for lieutenant governor. To facilitate the election, COFO brought in college students, mostly whites from northern universities.⁷⁴

On the eve of the Freedom Vote election in Forrest County, Chief of Police Hugh Herring declared that he would order the arrest of any “agitator[s]” his officers found in Hattiesburg, fine them \$500, and send them to jail for six months. When the Freedom Vote commenced in late October, Hattiesburg authorities immediately began arresting the Yale students facilitating the election and black organizers on trumped up charges. Judge Mildred Norris handed out high fines, though brief or no jail terms. On October 30, a taxi

⁷⁴ “Lynd is Convicted of Civil Contempt,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 15, 1963; Carl Arnold, Hattiesburg Report, September 24, 1963, Ser.15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; John O’Neal, Hattiesburg Report, September 23, 1963, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 184, 200-203; Bob Moses to SNCC Executive Committee, Ser. [?], Reel 40, SNCC Papers; “What is COFO: Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations,” n. d., COFO Publication, 1964, vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers; Mississippi Freedom Vote Campaign, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Dittmer, *Local People* 203.

driver punched a Yale student in the face, but police arrested the student for assault and battery. The constant police surveillance so frightened two black ministers that they rescinded offers to hold mass meetings in their churches. Undaunted, some 200 people flocked to a mass meeting at the Negro Masonic Temple Hall to hear Aaron Henry speak. Firemen and policemen arrived on the scene to disrupt the meeting. While Henry spoke, those firefighters and police officers stationed in their vehicles in the street blared their sirens and shouted on their loud speakers to disrupt him. During one such interruption, Henry declared, “I would like those people blowing the sirens and the firemen in the back of the room to know that there is a fire going on, but water won’t put this fire out.”⁷⁵

Police also tried to disrupt the Freedom Vote by confiscating many of the ballot boxes—a frightening prospect for local blacks because the paperwork contained the names and addresses of the voters. Despite police harassment, blacks in Hattiesburg and throughout Mississippi flocked to the polls. Black leaders like Victoria Jackson inspired thousands of blacks in their communities to take part in the Freedom Vote. Ultimately, 83,000 blacks across the state participated in the election, demonstrating that they harbored a significant desire to participate in the political process and that black enfranchisement would affect changes in Mississippi. Moreover, the Freedom Vote provided COFO with a medium for political organization and education. It united Mississippi civil rights activists across the state via a central “control office” established in Jackson to coordinate action and sub-offices in the five congressional districts

⁷⁵ First quote, *A Chronology of Violence and Intimidation in Mississippi Since 1951*, and *Police Brutality Report*, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; second quote, *Summary of Events in Hattiesburg, Freedom Vote, October 28 and 29, 1963*, vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers; Winfred Monicrief, “Yale Student Defends Self Well but is Fined,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 29, 1963; “Yale Students Here for Rally Tuesday,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 28, 1963; Elliott Chaze, “Speeches, Songs, Stomping and Clapping Mark Rally,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 30, 1963.

developed for “organizational bases.” Activists used these new beachheads to launch projects and to recruit locals in areas previously outside the Movement.⁷⁶

While COFO concentrated on the mock elections, the NAACP in Mississippi focused on registering blacks to vote in official elections in its Voter Education Project. The campaign in Jones County produced promising results. Forty workers contacted 17,887 people, instructed 4,997 citizens in voter education at churches, clubs, and the American Legion facility, and persuaded 697 people to attempt to register; 443 succeeded. Still, Mississippi continued to lag behind the other southern states. For example, in 1964, only around 28,000 of the 465,620 potential black voters in the state had registered, the lowest by far of the 11 Southern states in the study. Although five states had more potential black voters, Mississippi’s numbers still paled in comparison. For example, Alabama came in second to last place with 111,000 of its 526,656 black eligible voters registered. Thus, the black vote made little difference in Mississippi’s official 1963 elections. In Forrest County, whites elected as their sheriff, Bud Gray, a former Sovereignty Commission inspector and the officer who had allegedly offered his gun to Jimmy Walters to kill Mack Charles Parker for raping his wife. Lynd, who had no opponent, retained his position as city clerk, and he continued to defy federal orders to register black voters. James Finch—who had falsely prosecuted Kennard—won the district attorney’s office again. On the state level, Johnson defeated Republican candidate

⁷⁶ Quoting “What is COFO: Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations,” vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers; Sandy Leigh interview by Anne Romaine, November 7, 1966, Shelia Michaels Papers, McCain, USM; *Journal of Victoria Gray Adams*, October 7, 1963 – October 3, 1963, entry, November 5, 1963, transcript, Victoria Gray Adams Digital Archive, McCain, USM.

Ruel Phillips in a landslide election.⁷⁷

Fifteen days later, on November 21, the symbol of federal invasion to many white southerners—John F. Kennedy—lay dead in Dallas, felled by an assassin’s bullet. White children across Mississippi cheered in their classrooms when they heard the news that their president was dead. Many of Mississippi’s white adults also celebrated the murder. Several blacks working in white homes overheard their employers declare that Kennedy “needed killing.” Conversely, most blacks mourned the loss of the first president to really take notice of their struggle, though others pointed out his failure to fully embrace civil rights goals. Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Texan, took over the reigns of the nation. To the chagrin of many white southerners, Johnson shocked the country by proving to be a greater friend to civil rights than Kennedy. During his first presidential speech to Congress, Johnson called for the continuation of the slain leader’s policies, including the passage of the Civil Rights Act, “so that we can move forward to eliminate from this Nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based on race and color.”⁷⁸

The federal government offered more hope to Central Piney Woods activists on January 6, 1964, when the U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear Lynd’s appeal. Still,

⁷⁷ “Stand Tall Paul and Carroll Win,” and “Phillips Carries Free State Jones,” both in *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 6, 1963; NAACP Voter Education Project Annual Report of Jones County (January 1963 – December 1963), Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, NAACP Papers; “Finch, Evans Among Winners,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 7, 1963; “Bud Gray Elected Sheriff,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 28, 1963; Elliot Chaze, “Lynd Undecided on his Next Move,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1963. Chaze notes that Lynd would win the election as no Democrat or Republican opposed him that year.

⁷⁸ First quote, Freedom Summer Journal of Sandra Adickes, transcript, August 4, 1964, Adickes Papers; second quote, Lyndon Baines Johnson, speech, November 27, 1963, American Experience, The Presidents, PBS, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/36_1_johnson/psources/ps_firstspeech.html (accessed June 2004). Dittmer, *Local People*, 211.

Lynd refused to capitulate. His lawyers requested that the Fifth Circuit withhold action against him until the U. S. Supreme Court decided in another case if such litigation required a jury trial. If the court indeed found juries necessary in such cases, Lynd could then appeal again because judges rather than juries had handed down rulings against him. SNCC viewed the U. S. Supreme Court's refusal to hear Lynd's case and his continued intransigence combined with the newly mobilized activists in Forrest County as the perfect opportunity to finally place the Hattiesburg Movement on center stage. For nearly two years, SNCC and COFO activists, with the help of prominent NAACP leaders, had worked in the trenches, recruiting locals, transporting groups of blacks to the courthouse to seek registration, supporting federal cases against Lynd, and launching the Freedom Vote. Each act proved important, but none managed to place Hattiesburg on the map of mass protest. To force the federal hand against white intransigence, they needed a powerful direct-action protest to highlight the white tyranny and to sustain America's interest. To that end, the COFO/SNCC leaders designed the Freedom Day demonstration in which hundreds of blacks seeking registration would converge on downtown Hattiesburg at once.⁷⁹

The black reformation had created a crisis in the police state, and at the close of 1963 it was about to transform into a full-blown war. White supremacy remained at the helm in Mississippi in late 1963, but it faced a daunting black uprising, supported in part by developments within the federal government. *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Bills of 1957 and 1960 established legal frameworks from which

⁷⁹ Fact Sheet: Hattiesburg, Mississippi, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 218-221.

activists could demand the termination of black oppression.⁸⁰ During the forties, fifties, and early sixties the Central Piney Woods produced several significant cases involving racial injustice, particularly the failed but significant battles against Theodore Bilbo and the lynchers of Howard Wash, the McGee and Kennard tragedies, and the Knight and the Lynd victories. Although four of the six cases proved legal triumphs for white supremacy, all of them exposed the horrors of racial oppression, undermined the foundations of white power, and cultivated the righteous anger of many blacks into a powerful force against white tyranny. The great reformers, like Kennard, Dahmer, and Murph, and the cadre of NAACP activists built the indigenous Movement, and whites like East and Mantinband provided important white support. The arrival of COFO, CORE, and SNCC and its morphing with the local struggle revolutionized the reformation and had a particularly powerful impact on Jim Crow's children.

The children of the reformation had come of age in an era when the white crackdown spawned lynchings, false imprisonments, and racial murders. Yet they also came of age in an era leading toward a black uprising, and many among them envisioned themselves as freedom fighters. They responded to white violence with more anger than fear. Since 10-year-old Larry McGill could remember, he had heard whispers of stories about white cruelty—the rape of his aunt explaining why his cousin was “so light” and the lynching of a cousin in a nearby county for looking at a white woman. His friends all had their own narratives, for in every “black household . . . stories were being told,

⁸⁰ For various causes of the Movement see, David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994), 69-75; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 246-251; Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 20-23; Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 355-359.

passed down. . . from generation to generation.” Although McGill had learned to fear whites as unpredictable “monsters,” he also learned to “stand up” in the face of terror, particularly after his mother, Bertie, began taking him to COFO meetings in Laurel and putting him “in the circle” of the racial struggle. As he came of age in the civil rights years, he associated manhood with fighting injustice. He became a “foot soldier” in the Movement, a life he later considered “his destiny.”⁸¹

When Melvin Mack learned at a young age that whites had lynched his great uncle by “plowing him to death,” he understood that whites could kill him simply because he was black. The lynching terrified his father to the point that he avoided the white world, never once stepping inside city hall or the courthouse. In 1990, as he died, he was still terrified of whites. Mack grew more angry than afraid, and by age 13, he dared to imagine a world in which blacks controlled city hall. One Christmas, the Mack children gathered around their makeshift Christmas tree and shared their dreams. Mack’s oldest sister and brother wanted to become teachers, his little sister a nurse, and his youngest brother declared his intention to become a doctor, sending the children into gales of laughter; they playfully tried to slap sense into him, “boy, you can’t be no doctor.” Melvin shocked his family all the more when he determined to become mayor of Laurel.⁸²

In Palmer’s Crossing, Jimella Stokes, also imagined breaking the prison of her Jim Crow life. She hated the sight of her mother sitting in the back of the car when her white boss drove her home from work. Her mother cared for that lady’s children and

⁸¹ Larry McGill, interview.

⁸² First quote, Melvin Mack, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 17, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 662; second quote, *Ibid.*, 705. *Ibid.*, 663-665.

cooked that family's food; yet she would not sit next to her. It angered Stokes that the public library contained an abundance of books she could never read because it belonged to whites only. It infuriated her that whites considered themselves superior to her—even the “poor white trash” residents who rarely bathed and lived in shacks in the black community because they could not afford a home in a white neighborhood. Yet when blacks passed them on the street, they called them “niggers,” as if that somehow elevated their status against their more financially fortunate black neighbors. Stokes never internalized her oppression—her family and her community taught her that she was equal to all whites; but she wanted an equal opportunity, too. She admired Victoria Jackson because she “never went across the mountain,” meaning she never worked for white folk; instead she opened a cosmetic business that was dependent on black customers. Moreover, she was also the first black woman in Palmers' Crossing to summon the courage to join the Movement. Jackson opened a porthole into a world beyond Jim Crow, and Stokes determined that she would find her way to the other side. In late 1963, Stokes announced to her family her plans to join St. John's Church because Reverend Ponder had opened his doors to the Movement, a step her church had yet to take. At the age of 15, Stokes boldly began her journey in the Movement and she became one of Forrest County's most vocal freedom fighters.⁸³ These children of the reformation became the infantry troops of the impending war. On January 21, 1964, Hattiesburg stood on the precipice of revolt.

⁸³ Quoting Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview by Patricia Boyett, January 9, 2009, MOHP recording; Sandy Leigh interview by Anne Romaine, Washington D. C., November 7, 1966, Shelia Michaels Papers, McCain, USM.

PART II

BLACK REVOLT:
STATE OF WAR, 1964-1974

“Whoever uses force without right . . . puts himself into a state of war with those against whom he so uses it; and in that state all former ties are cancelled, all other rights cease, and every one has a right to defend himself, and to resist the aggressor.”¹

—John Locke

“Decolonization is always a violent event.”²

—Frantz Fanon

“Like men, we’ll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.”³

—Claude McKay

¹ John Locke, “Second Treatise of Government,” in *Classic of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 810.

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 1

³ Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” in *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*, ed. Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 494.

CHAPTER IV:

REVOLUTIONS: FREEDOM DAYS AND WHITE KNIGHTS

On January 22, 1964, gray clouds darkened the morning sky and the rain fell, but nothing could stop the throngs of African Americans as they marched from the COFO office on Mobile Street toward downtown Hattiesburg to join the Freedom Day demonstration. Hundreds had summoned the courage to protest Theron Lynd's refusal to register black voters. Fifteen-year-old Jimella Stokes, who strode alongside her friends, Valerie Abrams and Gwen Merrit, could barely contain her excitement when she turned a corner and saw another group of local blacks led by COFO leaders and northern white clergy already picketing the Forrest County courthouse. She swelled with pride. "It was raining, but it was like the sun was shining." Stokes had no fear as she approached the courthouse and joined the Freedom Day revolt.¹

Black adults like Daisy Harris had lived under Jim Crow long enough to be afraid. As Harris neared the courthouse, she stopped suddenly. She saw a horde of policemen, garbed in rain coats and riot helmets, marching like a "platoon" toward the picketers. She huddled with the many other black adults, who desperately wanted to join the protest, but hesitated. The policemen barricaded Main Street and stationed themselves on both sides

¹ Quoting Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview by Patricia Boyett, January 9, 2009, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; "Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues," n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SNCC Papers]; Elliott Chaze, "Voter Registration Drive Begins Here," *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964.

of the road. A police vehicle roared to a halt near the protestors, and an officer blared over the loudspeaker: “People who wish to register, line up four at a time, and they will be accepted. All those not registering to vote move off. This is the Hattiesburg Police Department.” Instead, 50 more pickets joined the line. The platoon of police lined up beside them, wielding clubs, but they made no move to arrest or assault anyone. Fireman congregated nearby and prepared to aid law enforcement should a crisis arise. Deputies positioned themselves at the courthouse doors to direct the flow of citizens. The presence of white law enforcement officers troubled Harris, for she had often witnessed police terrorize her neighborhood. She understood the fragility of black life in Mississippi, and she had three young sons and a husband to think about. She had agreed to host some of the white ministers, but stepping out in public to protest was another matter.²

From the picket line, James Farmer, a stalwart figure in the Movement, noticed Harris and the others. Farmer encouraged them to join, but their eyes focused fearfully on the police staring back at them in the rain. Some whites watched the protest unfolding with curiosity, but most glowered with rage. Jimella Stokes glared back at them and sneered at the black “Toms,” as she thought of the nonparticipating blacks. She could not understand how these adults could bend to their oppression without a fight. Farmer was more patient than Stokes and continued to wave over Harris and the others. Eventually, inspired by the courage of Farmer, Harris crossed the street and into a world of black defiance. Few of the protestors had raincoats or umbrellas, and yet, they stayed all day on

² First quote, Elliott Chaze, “Voter Registration Drive Begins Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964; second quote, Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionist* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2002 edition), 111. Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; “Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues,” n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

the picket line, marching, singing, and wielding signs demanding “One Man, One Vote, Freedom Day in Hattiesburg” and “Let My People Vote.” The national media flocked to capture the images and convey the story across America. Local reporter Elliot Chaze described Freedom Day most accurately when he called it “Hattiesburg’s first all-out demonstration in the simmering civil rights war.”³

The Age of Leviathan came to an emphatic end in Mississippi on January 22, 1964. Freedom Day, as the first frontal assault on white supremacy in the Central Piney Woods, launched a major turning point in the black struggle. Even though SNCC and COFO staff members—visitors—rather than locals, led the charge, organizers recruited an impressive array of locals into the infantry ranks. Together they launched a massive and protracted assault on one of the most powerful citadels of white tyranny—the registrar’s office. The hundreds of local blacks, who daily joined the picket and registration lines, fought not only for their political rights, but they reclaimed publicly the humanity that the absolutist state had long denied them. The Hattiesburg Movement, however, faced a daunting and clever enemy. The city fathers, which included whites of the conservative and moderate mold, meticulously prepared to quash the life of the Hattiesburg Movement with a smart strategy—a nonviolent war of attrition in which officials neutralized the power of the protest by nonviolently arresting demonstrators, prosecuting them, and publishing their names in the newspapers so their employers would fire them and their landlords would evict them. They hoped the lack of violent

³ First quote, Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; second quote, Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionist*, 111; all other quotes, Elliott Chaze, “Voter Registration Drive Begins Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964. Daisy Harris Wade interview, September 26, 2008; Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; “Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues,” n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers. For background on Aaron Henry, see Aaron Henry with Constance Baker, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

public clashes would diminish media coverage and fail to elicit federal intervention.

Radical whites disagreed with the nonviolent strategy. That winter, hundreds of disgruntled white men gathered deep in the woods where they formed the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, chose Sam Bowers as their Imperial Wizard, and planned to annihilate the Mississippi Movement. The emergence of the white terrorist legion imperiled the conservative nonviolent strategy as it forced the federal government to intervene, however reluctantly and gradually. The clash of the forces of white supremacy, federalism, and civil rights activism contested, for the first time since the failure of Reconstruction, the absolutist state in the Central Piney Woods. The Freedom Day revolt hurled Forrest and Jones Counties into an era of chaos and uncertainty in which no power reigned unchallenged and in which the Central Piney Woods and Mississippi at large descended into a state of war for the next decade.

COFO and SNCC came well prepared to the first major battle of the war. Several weeks before the Freedom Day revolt, Sandy Leigh, an African American SNCC field secretary, became the new project director in Hattiesburg. Reared in Stratford, Connecticut, Leigh left Yale University during his junior year to join the Movement. He worked in projects throughout the South, including those in Greenwood and Birmingham where he gained valuable experience. When Leigh first arrived in Hattiesburg, Vernon Dahmer took Leigh into his home and provided him with all his local contacts. Leigh worked at Dahmer's farm by day and held meetings in the city at night. To galvanize locals and attract national attention for Freedom Day, Leigh and other SNCC/COFO leaders cooperated with the United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, and the Rabbinical Association of

America to bring to Hattiesburg 100 northern, predominantly white, ministers and rabbis. To mobilize locals, the clergy and civil rights leaders distributed flyers throughout Forrest County, canvassed neighborhoods, and held mass meetings to publicize the event. They tied the local NAACP to Freedom Day by convincing many members, like Dr. C. E. and Jeanette Smith, to open their homes to clergy. Teenagers, including Douglas Smith and Charles Glen, proved particularly helpful in recruiting hosts. On January 21, Smith and Glen knocked on Daisy Harris' door. By nightfall, four white ministers climbed out of their old station wagon with New York plates and entered Harris' home as guests. On January 22, she joined them in a war against her Jim Crow world.⁴

Northern ministers also stayed with hosts a few miles outside of Hattiesburg in the unincorporated community of Palmers Crossing. Victoria Gray, one of the most influential activists in Forrest County, resided there and nearly half the residents were related to her. She convinced her relatives including the Jackson family to host the ministers, and she persuaded many more to join the Movement. The Jacksons gently exposed their young daughters, Carol and Lillie, to the Movement. Their mother often joined the courthouse demonstrations, and she took the registration exam on five separate occasions before Lynd finally registered her. Over family meals, she introduced her

⁴ Profile of Sanford R. Leigh, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Sandy Leigh, interview by Anne Romaine, November 7, 1966, Shelia Michaels Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]. Michael Sayer, Comments on Hattiesburg Freedom Day, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38; Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; "Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues," n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers. "Voter Registration Drive Begins Here," *Hattiesburg American*, January 21, 1964; Deirdre McGruder, "Historic Church to be Torn Down," *Hattiesburg American*, April 4, 1993; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008; Jeannette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 46, 48-50.

children to the struggle. Their father was quieter, but he too registered to vote. The girls also joined their Aunt Vicky—Victoria Gray—on canvassing projects in nearby towns and watched as she convinced locals to join the Movement. A cousin brought the family black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and they heard adults discussing racial events. They learned to place in a broader context the pain and struggle of living in Jim Crow Mississippi, and they learned the need for courage and tenacity. Families like the Grays, the Jacksons, and the Harrises, as well as teenagers like Jimella Stokes, became the backbone of the local struggle. Their devotion to the Freedom Day project placed Forrest County on the map of the Movement.⁵

The night before Freedom Day, COFO and SNCC staff held a mass meeting at St. Paul's Methodist Church. Cardinal leaders of the Movement, including Ella Baker, John Lewis, Dave Dennis, James Forman, Bob Moses, Fannie Lou Hamer, Lawrence Guyot, Aaron Henry, and Annelle Ponder, flocked to the church with great hope that Freedom Day would turn Hattiesburg into one of the state's most powerful beachheads for the Mississippi revolt. A thousand people packed into the church pews and spilled into the aisles and doorways. A hush fell over the crowd when the lights dimmed and out of the darkness a voice sang: "We shall not, we shall not be moved." A thousand voices joined. As the lights rose, Aaron Henry declared that in 1949, a group of local blacks had filed the first affidavit with the Department of Justice protesting voter discrimination in Forrest County. Fifteen years later, black disfranchisement persisted. In blatant defiance of the 1962 federal court order, registrar Theron Lynd still refused to register qualified black citizens. Henry declared: "We don't plan to leave Hattiesburg until the Department of

⁵ Sandy Leigh, interview. Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

Justice takes Registrar Lynd in hand. That's why we're here."⁶

When 24-year-old Lawrence Guyot strode to the pulpit, the activists jumped to their feet and applauded. Guyot had become a hero to many Hattiesburg residents during his direction of the local project. His sonorous voice and powerful frame mesmerized the audience as he pumped his fist in the air and shouted: "Immanuel Kant asks—Do you exist? . . . Kant says every speck of earth must be treated as important!" The crowd burst with hope and excitement as Guyot declared that they would force white Mississippians to treat them as equals. Someone shouted "Freedom!" The audience responded "Now!" The chant continued until someone began singing "We Shall Overcome," and everyone in the audience linked hands and sang. The rally inspired the black masses as much as it disturbed the white patriarchs.⁷

Reporter Elliot Chaze, sent to the rally by the *Hattiesburg American*, described his uneasiness among the participants, both because he was the only segregationist in the crowd and because the lively tone distressed him. When a journalist for the *Chicago Daily News* asked him about his segregationist ideology, Chaze explained, "it's all very simple the way I look at it. I was born white and I'm for the whites. I don't see why a man needs any fancy philosophic arguments to support the fact he's rooting for his own team." Chaze's "team" prepared methodically for Freedom Day. The Sovereignty Commission, the Mississippi Highway State Patrol, Mayor Claude Pittman, and the local police gathered information from informants and briefed Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr. on COFO's plans. The patriarchs decided Hattiesburg police would organize blacks seeking to register and request persons unqualified to vote—such as nonresidents—to

⁶ Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 105; *Ibid.*, 102-106.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

leave. The registrar's office would work slowly in admitting the black prospective voters into the courthouse because reporters would have little interest in covering Lynd's excruciatingly slow pace of registration, and many blacks would return home rather than wait in the long lines. For the blacks who persisted, Lynd must fail most of them. Law enforcement and court officials would arrest and convict black activists who violated laws, but they would do so peacefully and selectively to lessen the nationwide media coverage. Local newspapers would print names and photographs of demonstrators so white bosses, landlords, and businessmen could fire, evict, and refuse to conduct business with the participants. The plan proved a clever counter-reaction because greater white America failed to understand the detrimental impact of nonviolent massive resistance and learned little of the brutality that occurred outside public purview.⁸

When Freedom Day commenced, Theron Lynd executed Hattiesburg's nonviolent resistance strategy with perfection. As photographers and reporters looked on, Lynd, dressed in a black suit, smiled as he appeared to execute his job dutifully. When Howard Zinn, a history professor and white SNCC activist, asked: "Mr. Lynd, is it to be assumed that all orders of the court are being followed now?" Lynd responded, "Yes, indeed. I will treat all applicants alike, just as I have always done. To us this is no special day." By noon on Freedom Day, 16 of the 19 blacks allowed thus far to enter Lynd's office had completed voter registration applications. Lynd informed reporters that he had turned two

⁸ Quoting Elliott Chaze, "Segregationist on the Spot at Big Integration Rally," *Hattiesburg American*, February 1, 1964; A. D. Morgan to T. B. Birdsong and R. L. Morgan, January 22, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, McCain, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]. Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; "Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues," n. d., Series 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers. Elliott Chaze, "Voter Registration Drive Begins Here," *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964; "False Witness," *Hattiesburg American*, February 8, 1964.

people away when he discovered that they were illiterate. Another man voluntarily left after stating that he was nervous and suffered from heart trouble. Law enforcement also executed their roles with precision. They refrained from attacking the protestors, no matter how much the protest enraged them. Jim Forman tested their resolve when he escorted an elderly black woman to the entrance of the courthouse and asked, “Sheriff, will you be a Christian and let this old lady inside?” When the sheriff ignored him, his voice grew sterner: “Is there no compassion in Forrest County for a woman seventy-one years old, whose feet are wet as she waits, who has nursed white children in her time . . . who has toiled in the fields of Forrest County . . . who now must stand out in the rain because she wants to register to vote?” Still, the sheriff ignored him and avoided either relenting to the demands or engaging in a confrontation. Forman also considered the interaction a success for the Movement; he later told Zinn, “Maybe it seems strange to make a fuss over standing in the rain, but it’s exactly in all these little things that the Negro has been made to feel inferior over the centuries. . . . it’s important educationally. To show the Negroes in Hattiesburg that it is possible to speak up loudly and firmly to a white sheriff as an equal.”⁹

Blacks in Forrest County showed that they were prepared to act as boldly as Forman. Despite the rain and the intimidation, most of the black locals stayed in the lines all day. As Victoria Gray recalled, “it was so cold, and it never stopped raining [but] those that didn’t have rain gear bought it and kept on marching.” COFO perceived the demonstration as a great success. Zinn noted “something unprecedented was taking place

⁹ Quoting Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 112-113; *Ibid.*, 111. Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; “Hattiesburg, Miss, Vote Push Continues,” n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, both in SNCC Papers. Elliott Chaze, “Voter Registration Drive Begins Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964.

in the state of Mississippi: a black and white line of demonstrators were picketing a public building, allowed to do so by the police. In all of the demonstrations of the past two and one-half years, this had never happened.”¹⁰ Zinn and his fellow activists had not yet realized the power of the white patriarch’s nonviolent resistance. Neither did they understand that it was only a part of the twofold strategy. White authorities in Hattiesburg employed the most powerful weapon at their disposal—the violent force of their police state—though they used it more artfully than their counterparts in places like Greenwood, Philadelphia, and McComb. They employed it behind the scenes outside of media and public purview. Publicly, Hattiesburg whites appropriated the Movement’s nonviolent rhetoric and turned it against the activists. Consequently, they succeeded in restraining federal intervention.

On Freedom Day, police arrested several activists, including Oscar Chase. A white 23-year-old Yale law graduate student, Chase became a police target a couple of weeks earlier when he tried to desegregate the waiting room at a bus terminal by sitting in the black section. When policemen found him transporting black locals to the Freedom Day demonstration, they decided to teach him a lesson. During one of Chase’s stops, he hit a pickup truck while trying to park, but after realizing he had not damaged it, he left. Later that day, officers arrested him on charges of “leaving the scene of an accident.” The police officers had refrained from causing a public scene, but they planned to teach the outsider a Mississippi lesson. They tossed Chase in jail with 11 other prisoners, including an inebriated white supremacist. When the drunk tried to start a fight with an older inmate, the jailer warned him to leave the man alone, but he told him that Chase was a

¹⁰ First quote, Jerry Mitchell, “Bowers Trial Reunites Civil Rights Activists,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 21, 1998; all other quotes, Zinn: *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 111.

“nigger lover.” The drunk turned his fury on Chase. He ordered him to stand up and fight him—an invitation Chase refused. When Police Chief Hugh Herring learned of the confrontation from a trusty, he ordered the jailer to remove the prisoner. But the night had only just begun for Chase.¹¹

Two hours later, the jailer returned with another intoxicated prisoner, Dave Bass. A belligerent white man often arrested for fighting, Bass boasted that he could “beat any man in here.” Unaware of Chase’s work in Mississippi, Bass ranted to Chase about the demonstrations and asked the jailer: “why the jail wasn’t full of niggers?” He told Chase that he had served in World War II, but that he would rather kill a “nigger lover than a Nazi or a Jap.” One of the incarcerated men informed Bass that Chase was one of those “integrationist[s].” Realizing that Bass was “sick enough to kill” him, Chase denied the charges. Bass waved his lit cigarette in front of Chase’s face and promised to burn Chase’s eyes out if he found out that he was an activist. Chase begged the jailer for help, but he ignored him. When Bass demanded to know if Chase was “one of them nigger lovers?” the jailer nodded.¹²

Bass fixed his gaze on Chase and said, “Now I know why I’m in this jail.” He lunged toward Chase with his fists cocked. Chase felt Bass hit him, and then he blacked out. When he regained consciousness, he was lying on the hard floor. Bass hovered over

¹¹ Quoting Account of Violence Against Oscar Chase, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers. Howard Zinn, “Incident in Hattiesburg,” *The Nation*, May 18, 1964, Joseph and Nancy Ellin Freedom Summer Collection, McCain USM; “Voter Registration Drive Begins Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964. COFO Report, n.d., Ser. 15, Reel 38; Mike Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in SNCC Papers.

¹² Account of Violence Against Oscar Chase, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers. Howard Zinn, “Incident in Hattiesburg”; “Voter Registration Drive Begins Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964. COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38; Mike Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in SNCC Papers.

him. As smiling policemen watched from outside the bars, Bass kicked Chase in the face and chest. Still, no officer came to his aid. Chase tried to rise, but Bass knocked him to the floor again. The lesson apparently had been delivered for then Chase heard the clanking of the keys and locks. The guards pulled Chase away from Bass and put him in another cell. Later, Chase observed a trustee give Bass a pack of cigarettes. Chase bled profusely for several hours. The following morning, Chase, still feeling poorly, contacted SNCC workers to bond him out.¹³

When activist Howard Zinn and attorneys John Pratt and Robert Lunney arrived to pay Chase's bond, they were shocked by his condition. Chase's blue work shirt was soaked with blood, the entire right side of his face had swollen, encrusted blood covered his eyes, and his nose appeared broken. Zinn and the lawyers arranged an appointment with an FBI agent. When the agent walked into the room, he surveyed the four men, and despite Chase's disfigured face and his blood-stained shirt, he asked "who was it that got the beating?" The agent took a report, but he never acted on the complaint. The following day, Mayor Pittman commended law enforcement, as well as the citizenry, for sustaining peace in the face of the protests. The *Hattiesburg American* professed that protesters admired the calm manner in which police responded to the demonstration. Elliot Chaze described the low number of arrests as achieving "a record for tranquility" in Mississippi and claimed that northern journalists became disappointed when no sensational violence or mass arrests took place. As for the jailhouse beating, Chaze reported that a trusty who had witnessed a "drunk" attack Chase reported the incident immediately, and Chief

¹³ Account of Violence Against Oscar Chase, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers. Howard Zinn, "Incident in Hattiesburg"; "Voter Registration Drive Begins Here," *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964. COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38; Mike Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in SNCC Papers.

Herring ordered the removal of the assailant to another cell. If Chaze knew that the jailer had brought another drunk into the cell, encouraged the beating, and only terminated the assault after he considered the punishment sufficient, he neglected to mention that fact. As word of the attack on Chase spread among locals and staff, it strengthened their resolve.¹⁴

Freedom Day transformed into the Freedom Days campaign when the day after Chase's beating, hundreds of activists returned to picket the courthouse, and many, including Daisy Harris, tried to register. Theron Lynd rudely threw an application form at Harris and asked her to interpret a section of the Mississippi Constitution, a task she suspected that Lynd himself lacked the ability to complete. He failed her on the exam, but he could not deter her. She took the test several more times until he passed her, and she returned every day to the picket line along with many other local regulars including Pinky Hall, Reverend John Cameron, Reverend L. P. Ponder, Willie Moore, Doug Smith, and Charles Glen. During the last week of January, 119 people took the registration exam. Hundreds of Hattiesburg's Jim Crow children, like Jimella Stokes, fortified the revolt by boycotting their school classes to protest Jim Crow education and by joining the picket lines. Editors of the *Hattiesburg American* castigated activists for using children in "racial agitation." The children ignored the rebuke. Consistently, they arrived at the courthouse in droves to fight for their liberty. Freedom Days proved so successful in Hattiesburg that SNCC and COFO introduced the concept in Canton in February and in

¹⁴ First quote, Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 117; all other quotes, Elliott Chaze, "Quiet Demonstrations Move into Third Day," *Hattiesburg American*, January 24, 1964. Zinn, "Incident in Hattiesburg;" "Pickets Resume Damp Tramp," *Hattiesburg American*, January 23, 1964.

Greenwood in March.¹⁵

The Freedom Days campaign grew stronger each week. Participating clergy formed the Hattiesburg Minister's Project, rented office space from J. C. Fairley in his radio and television shop across the street from SNCC/COFO headquarters, and developed a three-month rotation system that supplied the Hattiesburg Movement with a constant presence of northern clergy. Undeterred by white criticism, students continued marching in the picket lines with rotating groups of 50 participating each day so that they could attend school on their off-days. By January 27, SNCC had established a daily transportation system with ten drivers who picked up locals at multiple stations across the county. Police tried to interrupt the system by arresting drivers on false traffic charges, but COFO constantly replenished the losses with new volunteers. Vernon Dahmer regularly transported people to the courthouse, and on the days his farm or his businesses kept him away, he loaned his vehicle to anyone willing to take his place. Occasionally, the number of picketers dwindled to around 40, but they would also rise to more than 200 on some days. Activists regularly held mass meetings and often brought in famous African Americans, such as Dick Gregory, to draw more locals into the Freedom Days campaign. By February 11, 299 blacks had taken the voter registration exam.¹⁶

¹⁵ Quoting "Training in Disobedience," *Hattiesburg American*, January 27, 1964. Sandy Leigh interview; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 220-221; Michael Sayer, Hattiesburg Report, January 22, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Mississippi Student Union Pamphlet, n. d., Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008; Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; Cheryl Outlaw, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 2, 2008, MOHP recording.

¹⁶ Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Reports, January 27, 1964, February 3, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Sandy Leigh to Friend, February 11, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Reports, February 22, and 24, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, all in SNCC Papers.

Quickly capitalizing on the explosion of activist energy in Hattiesburg, the COFO/SNCC staff members strove to create a permanent Movement base in Hattiesburg and focused on developing local leadership. They educated locals about their political rights by distributing mimeographed copies of the Mississippi Constitution and basic voting laws. At mass meetings, they taught people how to interpret the Mississippi Constitution and how to fill out voter-registration forms. Once they had developed a core of local activists, they sought to establish permanent local leadership by organizing a block captain system. They also developed recruitment committees whose members encouraged voter registration through their churches and in their neighborhoods. The COFO/SNCC staff relied upon the day-to-day participation and sacrifice of the locals to sustain their efforts. The Committee of Concerned Mothers donated food and cooked for the activists. COFO/SNCC staff stayed in local people's homes, moving from house to house so as not to become a burden to individual hosts. As the Movement progressed, SNCC began holding evening workshops and smaller meetings called "teas for freedom," named after the Boston Tea Party at which Hattiesburg groups of 20 congregated in the homes of block captains to engage in "bull sessions" on canvassing, voting, and protests.¹⁷

Despite the mass mobilization of the Hattiesburg Movement, the city fathers

"Voter Registration Drive Begins Here," *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1964; Hattiesburg Demonstrations, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, February 13, 1964, Leesha Falukner Civil Rights Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, Faulkner Collection]; FBI Report, March 21, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 30, #44-1512-2579, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers]; Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators*, 50-51.

¹⁷ Quoting Hattiesburg Report, February 7, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 14, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Sandy Leigh, interview.

believed that they would acquire the upper hand even as they suffered some setbacks. On the economic front, they targeted blacks participating in the struggle by firing them, denying them access to welfare programs, and canceling their insurance. Authorities installed a cameraman at the entrance of the courthouse who photographed all blacks who entered. Whites published the photographs in the newspapers, which meant bosses, landlords, insurance agents, and White Citizens Council members knew the identities of all persons who tried to register to vote. White economic attacks soon followed. Pinky Hall, who sought registration and picketed the courthouse daily, lost her job as a maid, and the North American Insurance Company canceled the policy on a building owned by Lenon Woods after she gave a property bond on the building to bail out arrested activists. Woods had already angered whites two years earlier when she turned her guest house into COFO headquarters. The leaders of the Hattiesburg Movement fought back. To sustain the participation of local activists suffering the wrath of the white establishment, COFO established a welfare and relief committee to provide food and clothing to people like Hall who had lost their jobs. Sandy Leigh raised funds for the committee and other needs of the Hattiesburg Project with his mass letter campaign to Friends of SNCC in the North. The United Presbyterian Church of the USA intervened on Woods's behalf, for it too used North American Insurance Company. Church officials contacted the vice president of the company and threatened to cancel their policy unless he reinstated Woods' policy. To the chagrin of the white patriarchs, the vice president promised to comply with the church's wishes.¹⁸

¹⁸ Pinky Hall, interview by Kim Adams, December 13, 1995, MOHP Digital; Sandy Leigh, interview. Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Hattiesburg Report, February [?], Ser. 7, Reel 15; Sandy Leigh to Friend, February 11, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38; [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964,

Whites also tried to divide and conquer local blacks by frightening many members of the black community into attacking the Movement. However, the patriarchs underestimated the determination of locals who had joined the struggle and overestimated the ability of their black recruits to suppress activism. During a mass meeting on February 17, a local woman revealed that the minister of her church had expelled her when she addressed the issue of voter registration. The minister refused to allow that “mess” in his church. The story angered many of the older people at the mass meeting, and they decided to boycott the church. The Great Mt. Bethel Baptist Church expelled a 17-year-old girl who asked the church leaders to open their facilities to voter registration activities. A group of protesters staged a kneel-in outside the church, and many congregants joined them. SNCC and COFO had massively mobilized the black community, and the Freedom Days campaign drew locals from their bunkers and onto the battlefield; few retreated or betrayed the struggle in the face of massive resistance.¹⁹

The city fathers initially failed, but they continued to try to dissipate the mass demonstration at the courthouse through nonviolent means. A state legislator from Forrest County introduced a bill to outlaw picketing. On January 29, Judge Stanton Hall issued a temporary injunction ordering the termination of Freedom Day demonstrations until March 4 when the court would rule on the legality of the protest. Protestors ignored the ruling and flocked to the picket and registration lines. Guards stationed outside the courthouse questioned all blacks trying to enter and only permitted entrance to blacks who had business to conduct. Still, blacks waited in the long lines all day. Police tried to

Ser. 7, Reel 15, all in SNCC Papers.

¹⁹ Quoting Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 24, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 18 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in SNCC Papers.

shrink the crowds by erecting barricades in front of the courthouse where they established a no-picket zone and arrested violators, including Bob Moses. Still, the pickets returned. Police officers arrested one black and eight white Presbyterian ministers after they refused orders to cease marching in a restricted area. The police charged them with disorderly conduct. In response to these tactics, Dave Dennis of COFO reported the unlawful injunction and arrests to President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. He emphasized that the ministers and other marchers had the right to assemble and petition the government and concluded: “we shall have free assembly even if it means going to jail.” Activists continued to picket the courthouse.²⁰

During Moses’ trial, activists challenged Mississippi’s segregation laws when they gathered inside the courtroom and sat together in biracial groups. Judge Mildred Norris smiled pleasantly at the crowd, asked the court marshals to “segregate the courtroom,” and informed the spectators that if they failed to separate themselves, she would have to place them under arrest for “contempt of court.” Howard Zinn raised his hand, and when she granted him the right to speak, he stated: “Your Honor, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that segregated seating in a courtroom is unconstitutional. Will you please abide by that ruling?” After a short recess, Judge Norris declared: “We here in Mississippi have had our way of life for hundreds of years, and I obey the law of Mississippi. I have asked that you sit segregated or leave, or be placed

²⁰ Quoting “Pickets Parade Peacefully, *Hattiesburg American*, January 30, 1964. COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38; *City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi v. Robert Moses, United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race, et al.* (1964), case no. 22688, Ser. 15, Reel 38; [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, Congress of Federated Organizations Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers. Bill 546, Antipicketing Law, vol. 471, Reel 47, Congress of Racial Equality Archives, Papers, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter as CORE Papers]. Elliott Chaze, “Anti-Picketing Injunction Issued After Nine Ministers Arrested,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1964; Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 112.

under arrest. We would have appreciated your complying. But since you do not, we will allow you to remain as you are, provided you do not create a disturbance.” After Officer John Quincy Adams testified that Moses had broken the law by obstructing sidewalk traffic and refusing officer’s orders to disperse, Moses testified, “I had a right to be there. . . I base the right on the fact of the First Amendment.” Judge Norris disagreed, found him guilty, and fined him \$200. Soon after Moses paid his fine and rejoined the picket line, authorities arrested him again on charges of interfering with an officer. On January 28, Judge Norris found Moses guilty, fined him \$25, and sentenced him to 30 days in jail. The punishment failed to diminish the picketing and simply provided evidence that COFO and SNCC used in their legal battles against the state’s violation of federal laws.²¹

While the nine ministers sat in jail awaiting their trial, Rabbi David Z. Ben-Ami, who had become the head of Temple B’Nai Israel in August 1963, visited them—the only local religious leader to make such an overture. A survivor of Nazi Germany, Ben-Ami refused to ignore the horrors blacks suffered. His small gesture moved the ministers, but it terrified his flock. Sheriff Gray immediately contacted prominent members of the B’Nai Israel congregation and angrily reported the rabbi’s visit. The temple board ordered Ben-Ami to refrain from conducting any further actions that would disrupt the tenuous peace enjoyed by the Jewish community. Ben-Ami disobeyed their command. He also served on the board of the Mississippi Council on Human Rights, and in June the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights appointed Ben-Ami to its Mississippi State Advisory Committee. Once again, the Jewish community found itself with a rabbi committed to

²¹ Quoting Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 118, *Ibid.*, 117-121. “Negro Leader Charged,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 28, 1964; [?] Bradford, *Hattiesburg Report*, January 27, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

social justice and civil rights, a stand they feared.²²

The Hattiesburg Jewish community also witnessed with great trepidation the participation in the Freedom Days campaign of the Rabbinical Association of America. When one of its rabbis, A. James Rudin, tried to encourage Hattiesburg Jews to support the Movement, he learned, as had Rabbi Ben-Ami and Rabbi Charles Mantinband before him, that the local Jews were terrified. Those who owned retail businesses on Main Street worried because blacks only represented a fifth of their business. Resistance toward the black protest could result in a black boycott of their stores which would threaten their financial stability, but cooperation or participation with the black revolt would enrage the white community and a white boycott could destroy their businesses. Mostly, they feared violent white reprisals. One Jewish businessman complained to Rudin that many local whites perceived the black revolt as inspired by outside Jewish organizations more than the Christian denominations. The Jewish community worried that white segregationists would perceive Rabbi Ben-Ami's visit to the jailed ministers as a sign that the local Jewish community also encouraged the black revolution.²³

Among the white Christian community, Rudin met a few "moderates" who, at the least, opposed violence against blacks. He also found a small minority of whites—mainly professors at the University of Southern Mississippi or soldiers stationed in the area who

²² Rabbi Morris B. Margolies, "The Dilemma of the Jew in the South," *The Jewish Monitor*, July 1964, 57; "New Rabbi Assumes his Duties Here," *Hattiesburg American*, August 27, 1963; Drew Pearson, "Miss. Rabbi Told To Find New Job," *New Orleans States-Item*, December 26, 1964; Rabbi David Z. Ben-Ami Timeline; Edward P. Moran and the News, radio broadcast transcript, the American Broadcasting Company Radio Network, March 18, 1965, all in Rabbi David Z. Ben-Ami Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Ben-Ami Papers].

²³ Rabbi A. James Rudin, "Freedom Trend Unstoppable," *The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle*, March 6, 1964, Ben-Ami Papers.

supported integration and political rights for blacks, but most of them remained too frightened to support the Movement publicly. At least one white woman secretly donated \$500 to the Movement, and a white doctor, Eckard Johnson, encouraged his black employee, Willie Moore, in her Movement efforts. He allowed her to take time off to picket the courthouse and to make multiple attempts to register to vote. He even pledged to bail her out should authorities jail her. In Palmers Crossing, Victoria Gray attracted some poor whites to the movement when she organized a welfare and relief committee and allowed whites to receive aid. When Sheriff Gray learned about the integrated relief, he visited the homes of white recipients and ordered them not to participate. One white woman, a Mrs. Newman, defied the orders and continued to receive relief. She informed Sandy Leigh that she realized that she shared some interests with blacks and asserted that her white skin failed to provide her complete liberty. Whites called Newman and her family “nigger lovers” and threatened them until they moved.²⁴

Most local white Christians were stalwart segregationists who never questioned the Jim Crow system. Since childhood, they had been indoctrinated in the southern Christian creed that God condoned segregation as the natural order. They perceived themselves as good Christians and the activists as sinners against God’s plan. They insisted that local blacks had accepted the racial caste system until outsiders disturbed their thinking with their social gospel. If the activists left, they could pacify blacks. A *Hattiesburg American* editorial, “No Place for Ministers,” criticized northern clergymen for invading Hattiesburg and trying to correct “social and political wrongs, real or imagined” instead of saving souls by spreading God’s word. Arguing that the Bible

²⁴ First quote, James Rudin, “Freedom Trend Unstoppable,” *Ben-Ami Papers*; second quote, Sandy Leigh, interview. Cheryl Outlaw, interview; Daisy Harris, interview, September 26, 2008.

lacked passages supporting “ministers marching in picket lines” or removing children from school to participate in mass protests, the editorial called on the holy men to return home to solve the myriad of troubles in their own states. Local Presbyterian ministers claimed that the social gospel deviated from Presbyterian doctrine, and they sought to disassociate local Presbyterians from their northern brethren by pointing out that the activist ministers belonged to the United Presbyterian Church of the USA, while Hattiesburg’s Presbyterian congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church United States, or often known as the southern Presbyterian Church.²⁵

On February 3, when the trial of the nine ministers began, County Attorney James Dukes argued that the defendants had failed to comply with orders from law enforcement officers to move away from the main entrance of the courthouse and to return to the barricaded area designated for protesting. The ministers, he declared, must adhere to the laws like every other American citizen, and he contended that failure to enforce laws led to anarchy. Citing the Supreme Court decision *Edwards v. South Carolina*, defense attorney Diane Gaylor argued that the ministers possessed the right to picket the courthouse. Judge Mildred Norris refused even to peruse the case and found the nine ministers guilty of disorderly conduct and sentenced each of them to the maximum penalty of four months in jail. She also imposed \$200 fines for each minister and lectured the ministers on the duty of citizenship. The court later released them on appeal bonds raised by their hometown congregations. Dukes publicly praised Norris’s ruling, noting that “as a local minister said recently, God help us if we have no rules at all...the

²⁵ Quoting “No Place for Ministers,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 25, 1962. “Mixed Feelings,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 24, 1964; “A Puzzler,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 28, 1964; “Local Presbyterians State Their Position,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 27, 1964; James Rudin, “Freedom Trend Unstoppable,” Ben-Ami Papers.

defendants speak of their rights...every right is also subject to a corresponding obligation, and in this latter regard this is where the defendants failed – and deliberately failed.”²⁶

Dukes, as a tall, burly white man with a crew cut, fit the stereotypical appearance of a redneck lawman, but like most conservative whites, he was more complicated. A stalwart segregationist, he perceived white and black civil rights activists who demonstrated in the streets as dangerous “radicals.” Yet he never developed a “hatred” for blacks like some whites in his community. Rather, he expressed an abiding love for blacks he knew well, particularly his nanny who raised him, a black man who had taught him how to hunt and fish, and the black men he worked with during his summer breaks from college. As a young man, he accepted the “existing [racial] mores” of the time.²⁷ Certainly his philosophies and actions would grow more moderate over the course of the Movement. Still in 1964, without a doubt, he used the power of his position to suppress the Hattiesburg Movement through diligent prosecution of activists.

Local white residents fell in line behind Dukes. *Hattiesburg American* journalist Fitz McCoy argued that police had lawfully arrested ministers who had violated the law when they picketed outside the designated barricaded area, and McCoy considered their four month sentence justifiable. Resident J. H. O’Kelly condemned the ministers as

²⁶ Quoting Elliott Chaze, “Nine Ministers Given Maximum and Lecture,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 4, 1964. Frank Smith, Hattiesburg Report, February 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. In *Edwards v. South Carolina* (1962) the United States Supreme Court reversed the conviction of black students in South Carolina on breach of peace charges on the grounds that they were peacefully protesting their government; thus, the arrest and conviction violated their First Amendment rights of “free speech, free assembly, and freedom to petition for redress of grievances;” see *Edwards et al. v. South Carolina*, No. 86, 372 U.S. 229; 83 S. Ct. 680; 9 L. Ed. 2d 697, 1963 U.S. LEXIS 2050.

²⁷ James K. Dukes, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording.

modern “John Browns and Henry Ward Beechers.” He even claimed that the ministers paid blacks to join the picket lines. O’Kelly used a well worn paternalistic argument—he asserted that blacks knew “who their real friends are and who came to their rescue when they were victims of flood waters in Hattiesburg.” He warned the ministers that they should return home to preach; “otherwise as far as I am concerned, you also can be hanged to a sour apple tree.” To further advance the segregationist argument, five white Presbyterians from Forrest County traveled to Illinois to participate in a discussion at Mattoon Presbytery about the involvement of the northern Presbyterian Church in the Hattiesburg Movement. At the meeting, Hattiesburg lawyer Frank Montague, Jr. and Reverend W. J. Stanway argued that Christ had ordered the separation of political and religious affairs, and thus, the involvement of the activist ministers was unchristian. Montague praised Hattiesburg for responding to the demonstrations in a lawful manner. He even declared that neither Hattiesburg citizens nor law enforcement had prevented blacks from trying to vote and that Lynd, working under the auspices of the federal government and answering the dictates of his conscience, had executed faithfully the laws of Mississippi in registering voters and had never discriminated against any voter.²⁸

To dispel the lies and white supremacist propaganda, Reverend John Cameron, a black minister of Faith Baptist Tabernacle in Hattiesburg, explained that Lynd and white officials had denied black suffrage in Forrest County in blatant disregard of the U. S. Constitution and federal court rulings, and the black people of Hattiesburg had invited the Presbyterian ministers to help them achieve their constitutional right to vote. The

²⁸ Quoting Letter to editor, J. H. O’Kelly, “Says Marching Ministers Must Belong to Church Political,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 19, 1964. Fitz McCoy, “Rights and Citizenship,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 4, 1964; “The Hattiesburg Story is Told at Church Meeting in Illinois,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 24, 1964.

northern Presbyterian ministers justified their involvement in the Hattiesburg Movement by invoking the U. S. Constitution and the social gospel. Leaders of the Presbyterian church, including Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, argued that the ministers had the constitutional right to assemble and protest the government, and noted that as the church considered laws protecting segregation and discrimination “serious violations of the law of God,” the ministers had justifiably engaged in civil disobedience. Northern minister Robert Moore declared that he and his fellows had traveled to Hattiesburg “in Christian conscience to proclaim liberty to the captives, to open the prison doors for those who are bound to follow our Lord and Master who did the same.”²⁹

Hattiesburg’s white patriarchs considered these racial missionaries along with the SNCC and COFO leaders dangerous, radical insurgents; and they used the power of their courts and law enforcement agencies to suppress all their efforts to liberate the city’s black populous from the shackles of Jim Crow. They hoped the threat of imprisonment would eventually expel the interlopers from their lands. On March 9, white authorities convinced the nine convicted ministers to accept a plea deal rather than continue with their appeal. The ministers pled no contest to disorderly conduct, paid their forfeiture bonds, and fines, but avoided jail time. In a press release, the ministers maintained their innocence, but they explained that they had rather the Movement organizations devote their financial resources to the continuing protest rather than their appeal. Still, the patriarchs considered the plea deal a legal and psychological victory, and they continued to wield the badge and the gavel as their weapons of choice in battles against the

²⁹ First quote, Fitz McCoy, “Rights and Citizenship,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 4, 1964; second quote, “The Hattiesburg Story is Told at Church Meeting in Illinois,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 24, 1964. Fitz McCoy, “A Call for Truth and Fair Play,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 8, 1964.

Movement. On February 5, authorities arrested COFO workers Sandy Leigh and Perry Todd for failing to carry their selective service cards and Eddie Brown on trumped up burglary charges.³⁰

The patriarchs also targeted locals who joined the Movement. If the courts convicted them on felony charges, they would lose their right to vote which would invalidate the entire voter-registration drive effort. Policemen maintained constant patrols on the courthouse demonstrators. According to local protestor Earlene Boyd, everyone in the black community perceived Chief Herring as “mean and hateful.” Many blacks feared and despised his officers, who under his direction, harassed, threatened, and assaulted activists, and arrested a number of them on trumped up charges. When local African American Willie Carolyn Brooks tried to register, police officers spoke loudly throughout the examination period in an effort to distract her. Police arrested picketer Reverend Roy Smith on charges of assault and battery when Smith tried to pass by an officer and inadvertently bumped into him. Judge Mildred Norris found Smith guilty, fined him \$125, and sentenced him to 30 days in jail on the testimony of the officer who claimed that Smith pushed him. Police arrested 24-year-old picketer, Robert Armstrong, for shooting with intent to kill: Armstrong had been firing an air rifle at pop bottles. After Luella Haralson became a regular picketer at the courthouse, police tried to intimidate her by kicking down her door at 6:30 a.m. and hurling it into the yard.³¹

³⁰ “Ministers’ Cases Are Settled,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1966; Frank Smith, Hattiesburg Report, February 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

³¹ Quoting Earlene Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, September 29, 1992, MOHP Digital. Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008; Elliott Chaze, “One Found Guilty, Other Cases Reset,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 31, 1964. [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Reports, January 27, 28, 29, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers.

Police also targeted children for arrest. Officers arrested Edward Wade, a Rowan High School student on his way to a mass meeting, for using profanity and resisting arrest. The city did not charge bail for children, but authorities required parents to come down to the courthouse to sign their children out, which proved an intimidating experience for many adults. Many of the teenagers had a sense of invincibility common among the youth. When police arrested Jimella Stokes and a group of other teenagers for picketing without a permit, she spent her short stint in jail preaching about Mississippi injustices. While her mother signed her out, Stokes replied to the clerk's questions with the word "yes," purposefully omitting the southern courtesy of "ma'am." The clerk barked: "don't you say yes to me, you say yes ma'am." Stokes refused because she did not believe that the clerk merited such respect. Terrified, her mother shoved her out of the line and outside. The elder Stokes understood, however, that she could not quell her daughter's determination. Whenever her mother voiced her objections, Stokes would simply say, "I can't let you all stop my freedom."³²

Many black children showed similar courage. After the city fathers passed an ordinance that prohibited non-adults from participating in public demonstrations in an effort to thin the picket lines, four pre-teens, James and Anthony Harris, Horatio Jones Jr., and James Hix defied the law. Infuriated, policemen "ripped the signs" from their necks and hurled them into a police car. As the driver sped toward the station, the other officer called over his radio, "Headquarters, have the dogs been fed today? Oh, they haven't. Well we're bringing in fresh meat for them!" At the station, officers forced the

³² Quoting Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview. For more accounts of Jackson's arrest, see Sandra Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 65; Sandra Adickes "The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools," September 14, 1998, 16, Sandra Adickes Papers, McCain, USM. [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 28, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

boys to sit on the wet cement floor of the interrogation room. One of the policemen faced the boys, held up his blackjack, and asked them if they knew the weapon. “Yes sir,” they responded. As he tossed it between his hands, he said, “This is what we use to beat nigger’s asses with.” Suddenly, the door to the interrogation room flew open and a diminutive Daisy Harris entered and ordered the officers to release the teenagers—two of whom were her children. Harris reminded the officers that they could not arrest persons for exercising their constitutional right to assemble and petition the government. Anthony was amazed at his mom, “a Black woman confronting White police officers and not even knocking on the door or asking permission.” The officers, to the surprise of the boys, released them to Harris, and she transported them back to the picket line.³³

Harris and other adults increasingly dared to challenge whites. While Harris picketed the courthouse with other activists, a black woman “placed on the steps of the courthouse by whites” scolded them. They responded to her by singing, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round,” “Freedom, Freedom,” “We Shall Overcome,” “Come By Here My Lord.” Some locals like Lenon Woods boldly defended their homes, businesses, and the activists they hosted. One night, police and firemen targeted Sandy Leigh at the COFO office. They shined bright lights into the office, aimed their guns toward the door, and ordered Leigh to come out with his hands above his head. Then Leigh suddenly heard the “clack, clack, clack” of Lenon Woods’ “Minnie Mouse shoes” descending the stairs behind him. She threw open the front door, aimed a sawed off shotgun at the firemen and police officers and shouted: “Whos’ out there? Les, is that you? Now you just get to

³³ Quoting Anthony J. Harris, “Personal Recollections of the Civil Rights Movement in Hattiesburg, Mississippi,” 2, Anthony Harris Civil Rights Memoir, McCain, USM; *Ibid.*, 1-3. Biographical Information, Daisy Harris Wade Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Wade Papers]; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008.

getting. I know it's you. Melvin, is that you. You know I know about you. Now just get to getting. Get to getting." Woods continued to call out their names one by one and ordered them to leave. She knew a little too much about everyone in Hattiesburg. So the men obeyed the skinny elderly black woman and fled the scene.³⁴ Few blacks had such power, and many of them suffered under the strong arm of the police.

The Movement needed the aid of the federal government to effectively fight white tyranny. To evoke national empathy and pressure the federal government to intervene, COFO and SNCC used the media. In an article published in *The Nation*, Howard Zinn described Oscar Chase's jailhouse beating as representative of the police state in Mississippi. He lambasted federal officials for hiding behind the banner of federalism to justify their apathy in the face of state "tyranny," particularly when the constitution and federal statutes were precisely designed to prevent the formation of police states. SNCC and COFO also appealed directly to the federal government. Staff members sent detailed reports of police misconduct and judicial abuses to the Department of Justice and implored it to "enjoin police from intimidating voter registration workers." They also dispatched telegrams to President Lyndon Johnson and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The Department of Justice sent a few officials to the Hub City to investigate. Federal pressure led local authorities to reduce charges against Leigh and Brown from burglary to vagrancy and drop charges against others. The white patriachs' counterinsurgency, after all, was a war of attrition. By reducing and dropping some charges, they hoped to avoid mass federal encroachment, while sustaining their resistance against the black revolt. It worked. Throughout the winter and spring of 1964, federal

³⁴ First, second, third, fourth, and fifth quotes, Daisy Harris Wade, "Reminiscences," notebook, n. p., n. d., Wade Papers; all other quotes, Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 70.

intervention remained minimal, and the police state continued its attack against the black revolt.³⁵

Police enjoyed the aid of one of the most powerful forces of the police state—the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission—which kept tight surveillance on the Hattiesburg demonstrations. Commission investigators Tom Scarbrough and Virgil Downing distributed their detailed reports on the activities, the participants, the arrests, and trials to local authorities. The investigators emphasized that Lawrence Guyot and Reverend James Cameron were providing significant leadership to the Hattiesburg Movement. Based on the information culled from their informants and sovereignty commission reports, policemen harassed Cameron routinely. Even worse, officers arrested Guyot and charged him with “contributing to the delinquency of a minor.” Police claimed that he had encouraged a 13-year-old girl, Barbara Ann Thomas, to participate in the Freedom Day demonstrations without the consent of her mother, Mae Curry. According to district attorney James Finch and county attorney James Dukes, Thomas had left school on Thursday, joined the demonstration, spent the night with a resident on Mobile Street, and failed to return home until Friday. Police took her into protective custody before arresting Guyot.³⁶

³⁵ First quote, Zinn, “Incident in Hattiesburg;” second quote, Cliff Vaughns to Burke Marshall, February 5, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Frank Smith, Hattiesburg Report, February 5, 1964 and February 1964; Hattiesburg Report, February 7, 1964; [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Reports, February 12, 14, and 21, 1964, all in Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

³⁶ Quoting Jack Greenburg, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., *State of Mississippi v. Lawrence Guyot*, Mississippi Docket, October 22, 1964, 20, vol. 57, Reel 21, CORE Papers. *Lawrence Guyot Jr. v. State of Mississippi* (1964) case no. 137/6319, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 6, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; [hereafter cited as *Guyot Jr. v. Mississippi* (1964)]; “Negro Leader Charged with Contributing to Delinquency,” *Hattiesburg American*,

Authorities prohibited blacks from attending Guyot's arraignment. In the presence of his lawyer, Dianne Gaylord, Guyot pled not guilty and insisted that he had never met the alleged victim. During the trial, Thomas' mother testified that Guyot had encouraged her daughter to join the demonstrations. Barbara Ann Thomas tried to please both the prosecutors and the defense when she testified. Under direct examination, she claimed that Guyot had solicited her participation in the protest and requested that she mobilize her classmates to join. On cross-examination, she testified that she had never met Guyot, and she had participated in Freedom Day on her own accord. Despite the contradictory testimony, Judge William Harrelson found Guyot guilty, fined him \$1,000, charged him a \$500 peace bond, and sentenced him to six months in jail, but suspended five of those months for good behavior. Soon after the conviction, COFO discovered that police officers had interrogated many children in Guyot's case and tried to coerce them into making false statements against him.³⁷

Guyot's friend, Peter Stoner, a well-known white activist in the state, became a favorite target of police. The 25-year-old had joined the Movement and became a SNCC staff member while attending Tougaloo Southern Christian College in Jackson. When he

January 28, 1964. Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Reports, February 11 and 21, 1964; [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964, all in Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Tom Scarbrough and Virgil Downing, Hattiesburg Demonstration, MSSC Report, February 13, 1964, Faulkner Collection; Tom Scarbrough and Virgil Downing, February 13, 1964, MSSC Reports, Sovereignty Commission Records #2-64-1-65-1-1-1 through 5-1-1 and January 31, 1964, SCR #2-64-1-63-1-1-1 to 4-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Digital Archive, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as SCR, MDAH]. Investigator to file, February 27, 1964, SCR #2-64-1-68-1-1-1, MDAH.

³⁷ [?] Bradford, Hattiesburg Report, January 27, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; *Guyot Jr. v. Mississippi* (1964); Elliott Chaze, "Negro Convicted in Delinquency Case," *Hattiesburg American*, January 31, 1964. Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 1, 1964; Ser. 7, Reel 15; COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, both in SNCC Papers. Tom Scarbrough and Virgil Downing, Hattiesburg Demonstration MSSC Report, February 13, 1964, Faulkner Collection.

arrived in Hattiesburg on January 7, police arrested him on charges of obstructing traffic, illegal parking, failure to carry his selective service card, and possession of narcotics. The state dropped the last two charges and found him guilty on the rest. When Stoner refused to pay the fine, he remained in jail for six days. A few hours after policemen released him, they arrested him on charges of having an improper tag, no driver's license, interfering with an officer, and profanity. Authorities never tried the second case and released him after three days. Stoner resumed his activism. He transported people from Palmers Crossing to the picket line, attended mass meetings, and canvassed Hattiesburg to recruit locals to the struggle. On several occasions, Stoner complained to the Hattiesburg Police Department that Officer James Olson had threatened demonstrators. Finally, the assistant chief removed Olson from the beat. Infuriated police officers repeatedly harassed and arrested Stoner. COFO complaints to the FBI proved useless because agents considered Stoner a radical. Instead of probing Stoner's accusations, they investigated his background and even traveled to his hometown in Pennsylvania to acquire information about him from his family and friends. On February 4, when Stoner tried to visit Guyot at the Forrest County jail, the jailer, Print Jones, ordered him to leave. Stoner refused. He declared that he had a legal right to see the prisoner during visiting hours. Jones threw him in jail without officially charging him or informing him why he had placed him behind bars. An hour later, authorities charged Stoner with disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and resisting arrest.³⁸

Forrest County authorities held Stoner's trial in a room behind the jail where

³⁸ COFO Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Pete Stoner, "On Experiences in Hattiesburg," January 7 to May 21, 1964, 1-3, Pete Stoner Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Stoner Papers]; Peter Stoner, "A Glimpse Into the Past: A Few Words About My Civil Rights Days," Memoir, March 1998, Stoner Papers.

Justice of the Peace John Leonard conducted the kangaroo court. Dukes provided Stoner with a court appointed attorney who profusely apologized to the court for fulfilling his obligation to represent the activist. Stoner dismissed him as his counsel. Dukes called one witness to the stand—the jailer Print Jones—who claimed Stoner had arrived at the jail after visiting hours and demanded to see Guyot, shouting, “I God damn well am going to see Guyot.” When Leonard asked Stoner if he had any questions for the witness, he replied that as Jones lied throughout his testimony, he had nothing to ask him. Stoner declared that authorities lacked the right to try him on false pretences and that the trial was a charade. Leonard ordered him to take his seat, but Stoner refused. Leonard found him guilty of contempt of court, disturbing the peace, resisting arrest, and profanity. He sentenced him to 120 days in jail and fined him \$391.00. Stoner demanded his right to appeal, but Finch informed him incorrectly that he needed a lawyer to appeal.³⁹

While Stoner served his time at the Forrest County Work Camp, he became a victim of multiple beatings. With his radical ideas and his sluggish work on the various county projects, he irritated the guard, Les Morgan. One cold workday when Morgan refused to allow Stoner to retrieve his coat, Stoner spat on the ground next to him. Enraged, Morgan kicked Stoner and threatened to shoot him and then made Stoner work the entire day without his shirt. Morgan tried to entice prisoners to attack Stoner by promising them various privileges. Although they harbored hostility toward Stoner for his civil right activities, they refused to honor the guard’s request to attack him. They considered assaulting Guyot when he joined the camp to serve his one-month sentence. Guyot worked hard despite his many health ailments until authorities released him on

³⁹ Quoting Pete Stoner “On Experiences in Hattiesburg,” 3, Stoner Papers; Ibid., 2. Frank Smith, Hattiesburg Reports, February 6 and 15, 1964; Sandy Leigh, Hattiesburg Report, February 8, 1964, all in Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

bail. His discharge generated intense hostility among the inmates, particularly after they heard NAACP leader Charles Evers on a radio address, threatening, “if they bomb our churches, we should bomb theirs.” Many inmates wished they had taken the opportunity to brutalize Guyot while he was in jail with them.⁴⁰

Soon after Guyot departed, Morgan found a prisoner willing to beat Stoner. On February 17, Morgan transported Stoner to a special cell as punishment for his apathetic work attitude. Fellow prisoner Bob Moss greeted Stoner by knocking him to the ground and then shouting at him, “Get up.” Always prideful, Stoner rose to his feet. Yet he knew that he could not physically defend himself for he had committed himself to the Movement’s nonviolent tactics. He controlled his natural instinct to fight back, even as Moss repeatedly punched him. When Moss seized Stoner by his neck and shoved his thumbs toward Stoner’s eyes trying to gouge them, Morgan intervened to end the attack. Five days later, Stoner used his weekly phone call to report the beating to Sandy Leigh. When Morgan overheard the conversation, he punched Stoner, threw him against the door, then shoved him on the floor, and kicked him repeatedly. To Morgan’s dismay, eventually Stoner befriended several prisoners. Although the white prisoners disagreed with his civil rights beliefs, they ceased to harbor hostility toward him. He continued, however, to face violence from law enforcement officers and their lackeys. Despite efforts by SNCC to help him, federal investigators failed to respond to his case for months.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Quoting Pete Stoner, “On Experiences in Hattiesburg,” 4, Stoner Papers; *Ibid.*, 3-5.

⁴¹ Quoting Pete Stoner, “On Experiences in Hattiesburg,” 4, Stoner Papers; *Ibid.*, 7-8. “Pete Stoner Asks Court for Release,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 2, 1964; *Hattiesburg Report*, May 23, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

Finally, on April 21, Forrest County Constable Wilmer Kitchens transported Stoner to Jackson for his appeal. During the ride, Kitchens tried to instigate an argument by disparaging blacks. Stoner responded that he considered Kitchens inferior to blacks. Kitchens backhanded Stoner. Later, Stoner filed a complaint against Kitchens with the FBI, but the agents took no action. While Stoner stayed in a holding cell in Jackson to await his hearing, the jailer gave prisoners cigarettes to assault him. An obese man known as “Tiny,” another man nicknamed “Youngblood,” and a grey-haired inmate entered his cell, yanked him off his bunk, and threw him to the ground. They kicked him in the sides and kidneys, and punched him everywhere but his face so the beating would not show. The grey-haired man whipped him with a wide leather strap. During the beating, Stoner obeyed the civil rights mandate of passive resistance and refused to fight back. After the jailer turned the lights out, Youngblood visited Stoner again. Youngblood ripped off Stoner’s belt and beat him with it. Stoner refused to fight back until Youngblood tried to rape him. Desperate, Stoner fought. Youngblood broke two of Stoner’s ribs, but he gave up on his attempted rape and left Stoner’s cell. The trip to Jackson proved fruitless for Stoner, as authorities prohibited him from attending his hearing. Judge Sidney Mize rejected his appeal for release on a writ of habeas corpus. When Stoner’s lawyer informed the attorney general of the many beatings Stoner had suffered, Sheriff Gray and Jimmy Dukes, who returned Stoner to the prison camp, promised to investigate. Stoner knew not to trust them. Dukes implied that if Stoner disassociated himself from the Movement and left Mississippi, he would ensure his release. Stoner refused to accept the offer.⁴²

Soon after Stoner returned to the camp, two FBI agents took his statement about

⁴² Pete Stoner, “On Experiences in Hattiesburg,” Stoner Papers, 6-7.

the beatings in Jackson and the mistreatment he had received at the hands of Constable Kitchens. Stoner decided against informing them about the earlier attacks by Guard Morgan and the county inmate because he had to work and live with them. In early May, Stoner petitioned the Fifth Court of Appeals to release him on bail while he waited on his appeal and informed the court of the many beatings he had suffered. Finally, on May 21, authorities transported Stoner back to county jail where Sheriff Gray informed Stoner that someone had paid his fine, and he released him.⁴³ Police officers, guards, and prisoners were not the only white men in the Central Piney Woods who brutalized activists.

Throughout the winter of 1964, white men gathered in the woods and barns to form a secretive and extremely brutal Klan to suppress the black revolt. Their leader, Sam Bowers, believed that God had called him “to preserve Christian Civilization,” just as he believed the Lord had summoned Christian prophets and warriors in biblical times. To fulfill his mission, Bowers built a white supremacist army, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, and established its headquarters in his hometown of Laurel. Bowers moved far beyond congregating with a few racist yokels to plan senseless violence. Rather, he crafted a white supremacist ideology from traditional and modern volkish concepts and developed a grand strategy to destroy the insurgents and turn away invaders. He developed a political and military system to provide the ideology with a tangible structural base and trained his White Knights to become crusading volkish warriors with a mission to sustain white supremacist control over Mississippi. With great foresight, Bowers actively recruited police officers, sheriffs, deputies, and highway

⁴³ Ibid., 7-8; “Pete Stoner Asks Court for Release,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 2, 1964; Hattiesburg Report, May 23, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

patrolmen throughout Mississippi into the Klan.⁴⁴

Still, Bowers soon found that although many whites agreed with his racist theories, some opposed his methodologies, particularly the new governor, Paul B. Johnson, Jr., who perceived Bowers and his violent white supremacist army as a danger to Mississippi sovereignty. Surprisingly, Johnson's inaugural address, delivered the day before COFO launched Freedom Days, lacked the racial demagoguery so prevalent in his campaign. Instead, he focused on Mississippi's economic and educational development. As he closed his speech, he insisted that Mississippi must acquiesce to social and political change. Whether or not Mississippians liked it, they were part of America and "hate, or prejudice, or ignorance will not lead Mississippi while I sit in the Governor's chair. I will oppose with every fiber of my being, and with every resource at my command, any man, any faction, any party, or any authority which I feel is morally wrong or constitutionally in error." Governor Johnson hoped to terminate Klan infiltration of law enforcement, and he notified all Mississippi Highway Patrolmen (MHP) that if they belonged to the hooded order, they must immediately admit their membership and inform the governor's office of all their knowledge about the Klan or face termination. Many officers complied and became informants for the governor. Others, including Officer E. M. Cowan from Laurel, cast their lot with the Klan. The governor sustained surveillance on the recalcitrant and gathered copious intelligence on the Klan. Over the next several years, Johnson provided

⁴⁴ Quoting Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 49-50; *Ibid.*, 50-51, 59-75; "Executive Lecture," March 1, 1964, Misc. Klan Info, Helfrich Papers; "White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi," Appendix, in FBI Report, August 27, 1965, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-282, Helfrich Papers; Erle Johnston to Governor Johnson, May 1, 1964, PBJ Papers.

the FBI with his findings.⁴⁵

Despite Governor Johnson's rhetoric, neither the governor's officer nor the FBI proved a sudden champion of the Civil Rights Movement and neither fully committed the resources necessary to prevent the rise of the Klan in the winter and spring of 1964. Their response changed during the summer when the Klan grew more violent, but by then it proved much more difficult to stop the White Knights. The FBI neglected to open an office in Mississippi until that summer, which forced agents to conduct their fairly paltry investigation of the White Knights out of the New Orleans office. Since the advent of the Movement in the South, FBI agents had often stood at the periphery of violent clashes. They watched and took notes as police or mobs attacked civil rights protesters. When asked to protect activists, the FBI provided the standard response that it was an "investigative" bureau, not a law-enforcement agency. Many agents working in Mississippi hailed from the South, and their empathy often lay with segregationists. Several former FBI agents worked as investigators for the Sovereignty Commission. Even the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, objected to racial equality.⁴⁶

Although Johnson's governorship departed from the vulgar rhetoric that had

⁴⁵ Quoting Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., January 21, 1964, *Mississippi Senate Journal*, 1964, 37-38. Erle Johnston to Governor Johnson, May 1, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 9; A. D. Morgan to Johnson, March 12, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, both in PBJ Papers; George Saxon, interview by Reid Stoner Derr, June 3, 1993, MOHP Digital.

⁴⁶ Quoting Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 88; For FBI shift toward its war on the Klan, *Ibid.*, 86-87. For New Orleans base, see Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, Helfrich Papers. "J. Edgar Hoover Arrives in State," *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 1964. "Killed by the Klan," prod. and dir. Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette; Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 27; Dittmer, *Local People*, 250; Sarah Rowe-Sims, "The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: An Agency History," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 61 (Spring 1999): 29-39.

symbolized his predecessors' reign, he was not a moderate on racial issues as some historians suggest. Rather, as a pragmatic conservative politician attuned to the shifting political climate on a national level, Johnson opposed white supremacist violence because it forced the federal government to intervene. Segregationists like Johnson wanted to quash the Civil Rights Movement and sustain the racial status quo, but they perceived nonviolent resistance as a much more useful weapon against the Movement. Toward that end, Johnson wielded his power to support and sign legislation designed to destroy the Movement. Johnson publicly lambasted the Civil Rights Movement, worked in conjunction with the Citizens Councils and the Sovereignty Commission to suppress Movement activities, introduced and signed into law state bills designed to prevent Movement protests, launched legal battles against federal civil rights legislation, and used the MHP to spy on activists.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, because Johnson opposed racial violence, he inadvertently aided some civil rights goals. Information that the FBI, the MHP, and Governor Johnson collected on the White Knights proved crucial to the FBI's Klan investigations, which escalated from a minor inquiry in the winter of 1963 to a full blown war at the close of the summer of 1964. During the winter of 1963 and 1964, the FBI directed its agents to maintain communication with MHP officers infiltrating the Klan and to develop their own informants to acquire information on the Klan's leaders, activities, groups, members and location of klaverns. The investigation drew the agents toward the apex of

⁴⁷ For Governor Paul Johnson's response to the Klan and the Movement, see Ser. II, Subser. 9, Subser. 10, and Subser. 4, PBJ Papers. For interpretation of Governor Johnson as a moderate on racial issues, see Reid Stoner Derr, "The Triumph of Progressivism: Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr., and Mississippi in the 1960s," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1994) and Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 115-119, 125-126, 132-, 134, 143, 223.

Mississippi's racial violence. Agents soon learned that Bowers had initially become a member of the Mississippi chapter of the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Louisiana, but in late December 1963, he decided to break ties with the group and form his own Klan so he could comprehensively attack civil rights uprisings in Mississippi. On February 15, 1964, the break between Louisiana and Mississippi Klansmen became official when 200 members of the Original Knights of the KKK congregated at Brookhaven, Mississippi to defect from the Original Knights and form the White Knights. The new organization elected Sam Bowers Imperial Wizard.⁴⁸

Over the next six months, the FBI became increasingly concerned by these developments and tightened their surveillance on Bowers. Despite the surveillance over the next several years, Bowers ordered at least nine murders and over 300 bombings and assaults. No doubt he was, as theologian Charles Marsh describes him, "the animating force behind white Mississippi's journey into the heart of militant rage, the Kurtz at the heart of darkness of the anti-civil rights movement." Why he became Mississippi's Kurtz, proves difficult to determine because Bowers wove a web of mystery around his past through omissions and lies, and few of his friends, if anyone knew him well. Bowers suffered from instability, failure, isolation, self-hatred, and intellectual arrogance. He was also a man who harbored a quiet desperation for a sense of belonging and spent his life in constant search of God's purpose for him. During Bowers' directionless and lonely

⁴⁸ FBI Summary Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115, 10, 72, Helfrich Papers; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 56; Edward L. McDaniel, interview by Orley B. Caudill, August 12, 1977, MOHP Digital. McDaniel was a founding member of the Mississippi Chapter of the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and an original member of the White Knights. Although he traveled across the state, he was mostly involved in Adams County Klan work. In July 1964, he left the White Knights to join The United Klans of America and was elected Grand Dragon of the Mississippi area.

childhood, he grappled to find a meaning for his life and he craved belonging.⁴⁹

Born in New Orleans to Sam Bowers Sr., and Evangeline Patton Riggs on August 6, 1924, Bowers experienced an unsettled youth. His father worked for a time as a salesman, but he changed occupations and state residences fairly often. At 14-years-old, Bowers experienced further instability when his parents divorced. He briefly tried living with his father and moved with him between New Orleans, Florida, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast before settling in Jackson with his mother in 1939. Bowers had two siblings, a brother Emile and a sister Maureen, but it appears that he was the only child to live with his single mother in Jackson. It is unclear the role religion played in his childhood. Bowers later claimed that he had a Methodist upbringing; however, an FBI background check revealed that Bowers' parents and siblings had attended the Catholic Church in New Orleans. Agents never located a baptismal record in the Catholic Church for Bowers.⁵⁰

During his adolescent years and early adulthood, Bowers vacillated between bouts of intense discipline and erratic behavior. As a teenager, Bowers and a friend had broken into their school and vandalized the desks of teachers who had caused them trouble. Bowers' stint in the United States Navy from 1941 to 1945 provided him with some discipline. He only received one negative mark on his record—a court-martial conviction

⁴⁹ Quoting Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 49; *Ibid.*, 224n. For evidence of Bowers' attempts to create mystery surrounding his past, compare his nine volume FBI file to his interviews with Marsh in *God's Long Summer*, 49-81 and to Sam Bowers, interview by Deborah Spencer, October 24, 1983, transcript, MDAH Digital Archive. For example, Bowers informs Marsh he came from a Methodist background, but FBI agents learned that his family attended a Catholic Church in New Orleans.

⁵⁰ FBI Investigative Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115, Helfrich Papers; SAC New Orleans to SAC, Jackson, July 7, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-249, Helfrich Papers; Sam Bowers, interview; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 50-51.

for absence without leave for six hours. In 1945, he obtained an honorable discharge as Machinist Mate First Class. During his service, on the long days far from his home and from shore, Bowers enjoyed the powerful sense of a brotherhood and belonging he often longed for as a child. Although his nation was fighting against fascist powers, he developed an affinity for fascism during his service. According to Bowers, the Navy fostered a fascist community because it was “anticommunist,” “antihumanist,” and “anti-individualistic,” and the service required that sailors must place the community and community discipline before themselves. After his military career, Bowers attended Tulane University where he studied engineering and received high grades. He did not complete his studies in New Orleans because he met Bus Boyd, a Bolshevik, who persuaded him to attend the University of Southern California with him. Later, Bowers became a rabid anti-communist. At the time, he apparently had yet to embrace fully the fascist philosophy that had intrigued him during his military service. At USC, Bowers continued to study engineering, but he received poor grades because he and Boyd spent much of their time carousing. Bowers lost his way again. When his father offered to help him open a business, in the late 1940s, Bowers moved back to Mississippi.⁵¹

After settling in Laurel, Bowers struggled as he opened and closed one failed business after another, but he persevered. Finally, he established his moderately successful Sambo Amusement Company, a pinball machine business. In 1959, Bowers persuaded Robert Larson, a former college buddy from USC who had recently divorced his wife, to move to Laurel and join his business. They became roommates as well as business partners, running their businesses, including Sambo Amusement and Magnolia

⁵¹ Quoting Sam Bowers, interview. Marsh *God's Long Summer*, 52-53; FBI Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115, Helfrich Papers.

Consolidated Realty, out of their residence. Some Klansmen eventually suspected Bowers and Larson were lovers. Bowers showed no interest in dating, and the thousands of FBI files on Bowers make no mention of a female companion. Klansmen considered homosexuality effeminate and abnormal and spoke of their theories of Bowers' homosexual orientation in disparaging terms.⁵² Bowers may have been asexual or perhaps he embraced an ascetic devotion to his white supremacist crusade. If Bowers was gay, he kept it a secret.

Bowers, under the influence of his father, Sam, Sr. and his mentor, Walter Johnson, embarked upon a journey toward the inferno of white rage. Among a violent brethren of racists, he found that sense of belonging he had always sought, and he determined that he must lead Mississippi in a white supremacist crusade against the black infidels and their communist Movement leaders. Johnson, as well as Sam, Sr., explained to Bowers that good white southerners would not mistreat blacks for sport but must control them by oppressing those black people who stepped out of their place. According to Bowers, Johnson joined the mob that abducted a black man jailed for killing a white man, and hung him over a bridge. It is likely that Bowers was referring to the 1942 lynching of Howard Wash. Bowers joined one of the white mobs that tried to lynch Willie McGee and was disappointed that the state rather than the mob executed McGee; he liked the idea of the Mississippi white mob defying the federal government which he

⁵² Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 53. FBI Report, December 29, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 42, #44-1512-3492, Helfrich; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Martin FBI File, vol. 3, #157-5183-173, Helfrich Papers. For discussion of Bowers' sexuality in FBI files, see FBI Report, December 29, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 42, #44-1512-3492; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Martin FBI File, vol. 3, #157-5183; FBI Report, August 27, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-282, all in Helfrich Papers.

perceived as interfering in the case. Bowers supported “lynching of . . . niggers for these horrible crimes,” because he considered such acts “part of the war on the federal government.”⁵³

Bowers also turned his violence and rage inward. Plagued with bouts of depression and sudden bursts of rage, Bowers became suicidal during the 1950s. He claimed that on the day he decided to kill himself, God saved him and called him to serve as His instrument for the white supremacist Christian crusade. He began studying the Bible with great intensity and finally concluded that God had called him to purify America by maintaining white supremacy through whatever means necessary. A voracious reader, Bowers also immersed himself in studies of Nazism and white supremacist literature such as Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman*.⁵⁴

Enamored with Dixon’s Klansmen and Adolph Hitler’s Nazis, Bowers struggled to tie his heritage to these powerful white supremacist symbols. He liked to brag that his paternal grandfather E. J. Bowers had participated in the Confederate guerilla warfare struggle in the aftermath of the Civil War in which he had lynched and exiled Yankees and scalawags. Later, E. J. Bowers, Jr., became a lawyer and politician moving through the ranks of the Democratic Party and eventually served as a state legislator and a congressman. Bowers’ mother was from Illinois and her father, Lincoln James Riggs, a land speculator, became quite prosperous. Bowers probably disliked the touch of Yankee and carpetbag heritage that threatened to marginalize him from his southernness so he emphasized Riggs’ marriage to a German American woman, Olive Payton of Virginia,

⁵³ Quoting Sam Bowers, interview. Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*; 49, 53-55.

⁵⁴ Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, 53-55; Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman* (New York: Gossett and Dunlap, 1905).

who Bowers claimed was related to Hitler's second-in-command, Rudolph Hess. Nazis were certainly a powerful symbol of white supremacist power and bolstered Bowers' sense of his re-imagined self. His reinvention became complete when he joined the Hillcrest Baptist Church in Laurel and eschewed his Catholic heritage. He had purged himself of his marginalized and purposeless past and exaggerated his white supremacist roots to set the stage for his rise as the pivotal leader in Mississippi's racial war.⁵⁵

As the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Bowers not only placed himself at the center of the racial war, but he cast himself as the warrior king in his white supremacist version of God's historical crusade against evil. For Bowers believed that God had called him, just as he had summoned Christian warriors in biblical days, to slaughter heaven's enemies. He perceived the world in Manichean terms, locked into the epic battle since Genesis, where the forces of light struggled against the forces of dark for control over humanity. Bowers proclaimed Anglo-Saxon Christians the force of light, and he tied his white supremacist crusade to the biblical story of Elijah the Tishbite in which the false prophets of Canaan led Yahweh's people astray by convincing them to worship "the prophets of Baal." Elijah saved God's people by forcing them to slaughter the false prophets. Bowers vowed to save his land from the moral ruin of integration and resulting sin of miscegenation, and he pledged to eradicate the modern false prophets—the "heretics" from Mississippi. Bowers explicitly named such heretics in one of his manifestos, "My Fellow American," when he argued: "We do not accept Jews, because they reject Christ, and, through the machinations of their International Banking Cartel, are at the root-center of what we call 'communism' today. We do not accept Papists, because they bow to a Roman dictator, in violation of the First Commandment, and the

⁵⁵ Sam Bowers, interview; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 50-51.

True American Spirit of Responsible, Individual Liberty. We do not accept Turks, Mongols, Tartars, Orientals, Negroes, nor any other person whose native background of culture is foreign to the Anglo-Saxon system of Government by responsible, FREE, Individual Citizens.” As Bowers believed tyrannies emerged in all countries ruled by non-whites, he called Anglo-Saxons to forestall the communist coup. God’s Christian army—the White Knights—must slaughter the forces of darkness, obliterate integration, and force all other peoples to submit to their control.⁵⁶

Bowers not only aspired to create an army, but a polity which he dubbed the Invisible Empire because of its secrecy and power. Although many Klansmen later resented Bowers’ excessive power over the Invisible Empire and even considered him a dictator, he initially tried to present himself as a democratic leader in the vein of the traditional American president, and the empire, a republic modeled after the American Constitution—or at least the parts he liked. The Klan Constitution dispersed power among three branches of government—the executive (the Imperial Wizard), the legislative (the Klongress), and the judicial (composed of five Klan Justices). It possessed a Bill of Rights that provided members with entitlements to due process and basic liberties and created a representative democracy in which citizens elected leaders to make decisions. The constitution even provided a procedure for adopting amendments. Similar to America’s federalism paradigm, the Klan Constitution established different levels of government—the Klan (state) level, the province (district) level, and the klavern (local) level. It divided the Realm of Mississippi into five Districts with Jones and Forrest under

⁵⁶ First quote, Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, 61; second quote, *Ibid.*, 64; *Ibid.*, 50-51, 60-64; last quote, “My Fellow Americans,” Klan flyer, Misc. Klan Info, Helfrich Papers. Executive Lecture,” March 1, 1964; *The Klan Ledger*, Early Autumn Edition, n. p., all in Misc. Klan Info, Helfrich Papers.

District E or 5. Each local klavern had twelve officers including the Exalted Cyclops (the President), the Klaliff (Vice President), the Kludd (the Chaplain), the Klarogo and the Klexter (inner and outer guards respectively) and the Klokan (the Klan Investigator) who examined proposed attacks on Klan enemies. With the approval of, or under orders from the Imperial Wizard, the Exalted Cyclops oversaw projects assigned to his klavern.⁵⁷

Bowers headquartered his White Knight operations in Laurel at his residence/business Sambo Amusement Company—an austere wood-frame structure located on the south end of 4th Avenue. No signage identified his business, and visitors found themselves confronted with a fortress. The Imperial Wizard barricaded his property with 18-foot-high fences reinforced with thick razor wire. He even boarded all windows that could be seen from the streets, and he rarely opened his iron door to strangers. A pack of poorly fed dogs roamed the property, finding shade in the various deteriorating pickup trucks that littered the neglected grounds. Behind the iron door, Bowers kept copious white supremacist materials, stockpiled weaponry, and collected strange masks. He was an enigma to his neighbors. They knew him only as a handsome man always dressed in dapper suits and sunglasses, who ran the White Knights.⁵⁸

Bowers' White Knights grew quickly over the winter and spring of 1964 with klaverns popping up all over the state. By May close to 6,000 had joined the empire. Forrest County formed a klavern by the summer of 1964 with particularly violent members like Mordaunt Hamilton. Jones County, as the headquarters, eventually had five

⁵⁷ *The Constitution of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of the Sovereign Realm of Mississippi*, in State v. Charles Nobles series, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as White Knights constitution, Helfrich Papers].

⁵⁸ Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 35-37.

klaverns. Early members included farmer and business owner Lawrence Byrd, Laurel Police Officer Jerry Smith, and Mississippi Highway Patrolman Edward M. Cowan. The White Knights expanded quickly in Jones County and spawned a new klavern in Ellisville, which included a preacher, Cecil Sessum, who became one of its most violent members and who later rose to Exalted Cyclops of the Laurel Unit. The Ellisville Klavern soon boasted a membership of thirty-one. White Knights initiated Klan candidates deep in the woods and led them to an altar where they placed their hands over a gun and sword crossed on top of a Bible. The new Klansmen devoted their lives to the “Holy Cause of preserving Christian Civilization,” and their “Being not only to combat satan but God willing to the triumph over his malignant forces and agents here on earth.” They also swore to obey their superior officers and to maintain the secrecy of the Klan. Death was the punishment for violating the oath.⁵⁹

To some white men, the Klan served as a source of entertainment and community belonging, while others were true believers, who found meaning in their violent missions. Billy Roy Pitts, who became a member of the Laurel Klavern, recalled: “to begin with they started me on cross burnings, warning people . . . And I was young and this was exciting, it was really exciting to me. I thought I was doing my Christian duty. I thought I

⁵⁹ Quoting White Knights Constitution, 36-37, Helfrich Papers. For the massive strength of the Jones County klaverns, see Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 24-25. For the White Knight klaverns development, membership, and rituals across the Central Piney Woods, see Hunter E. Helgeson to SAC, June 3, 1964, Bowers FBI File: vol. 1, #157-18-2C; FBI Supplemental Summary Report, January 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-393; Stephen W. Callendar to SAC, New Orleans, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-5; SA Stephen W. Callendar to SAC, Jackson, March 28, 1964, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, # 157-18-12; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March, 1966, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; Loren C. Brooks to SAC, February 1, 1966, DABURN FBI File, # 44-1512-528, all in Helfrich Papers. *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1998), case no. 6922, vol. 3, transcript, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998)].

was doing the right things. And as time went on it got a little heavier . . . shooting up people's house . . . burning them out. It got to the point I got sick of it. I was tired of it. But on the other hand I couldn't get out. This was a part of the oath—to obey our superiors.” Pitts characterized the Klan as an incredibly secretive and powerful organization and noted, “no one knew who they was or where they came from. You didn't choose to become a member. . . . They chose you.” The tentacles of the Klan, according to Pitts, reached into the governor's office.⁶⁰ While the Klan structured itself, recruited and expanded, and prepared for its war against its civil rights enemies, the white patriarchs' nonviolent tactics stymied the Hattiesburg Movement.

In the spring of 1964, the patriarchs focused their attacks on ending Freedom Day demonstrations. As of March 13, 1964, 196 blacks had registered to vote; though an improvement, the numbers paled in comparison to the 16,738 registered whites. By mid-April, about 700 blacks in Hattiesburg had applied to register to vote since the protest began. On April 8, in an attempt to circumvent black voter registration and other protests in Hattiesburg and throughout the state, Governor Johnson signed into law an anti-picketing statute proposed by a legislator from Forrest County. The bill forbade picketing on “state property, county or municipal courthouses, city halls, office buildings, jails, or other public buildings or property owned by the State of Mississippi or any county or municipal government.” Punishment for violations included a maximum of a six month jail sentence and a \$500 fine. On April 10, authorities used the new statute to arrest 37 demonstrators who tried to continue the Freedom Days picketing. Several more pickets arrived to take their place, and police arrested another 18 people. Police charged picketers with violation of the anti-picketing law and set bond at \$1,000. Despite the arrest, 11

⁶⁰ “Killed by the Klan.”

more people arrived at the courthouse the following day and police promptly arrested them. Picketing continued over the next few days though it began to diminish as “community reserves” decreased. On April 15, not a single person arrived on the picket line. As the *Hattiesburg American* reported, with the exceptions of Sundays, it was the first day that no protesters appeared at the courthouse. The white patriarchs considered the development a major victory because without deploying massive public violence, they had ended the picketing and the entire Freedom Days campaign had received minimal press coverage.⁶¹

White leaders also deflected attacks on segregation. John Frazier, who after several failed attempts to desegregate the University of Southern Mississippi, launched a renewed effort in March 1964. Sovereignty Commission Director Erle Johnston scoured Frazier’s life in hopes of finding something to use against him. On March 2, in a letter to President William McCain, Johnston revealed that he had found some damning information: Frazier, he claimed, was a homosexual. Johnston advised McCain to use the information to blackmail Frazier: either Frazier could terminate his efforts to desegregate Southern Miss or McCain would inform the Department of Justice and the media of his purported homosexuality. The strategy faltered, however, as Frazier was a heterosexual, and the commission never used the false information. On March 9, Frazier, accompanied

⁶¹ First quote, Bill No. 546, Antipicketing Law, vol. 471, Reel 47, CORE Papers; second quote, Hattiesburg Report, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 37, SNCC Papers. Plaintiff’s Proposed Findings, *United States v. Theron Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County and the State of Mississippi*, n. d., civil action case no. 1646, 8, in United States District Court, Southern District of Mississippi, *The United States of America v. Theron C. Lynd* Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as *US v. Theron Lynd*]; “27 Voter Drive Pickets Arrested Under New Law,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 10, 1964; “No Picket Line at Courthouse,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 15, 1964. Bob Weil, Hattiesburg Report, April 10, 1964; Hattiesburg Report, April 11, 1964, both in Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in SNCC Papers.

by NAACP President J. C. Fairley and two white activists, arrived on campus where the highway patrol, police, deputies, and constables were waiting for them. The officer allowed only Frazier to proceed and enter the administration building. Administrators once again rejected his application on a technicality. The university prevented the development of a sensational scene by barring the media from the registration area. Police escorted Frazier and his group off campus and ordered them under threat of arrest never to return. Fairley angrily retorted to police: "This is a free country. Now if we have business on that campus we will back."⁶²

The media, with the exception of the campus newspaper, failed to comment to any degree on Frazier's efforts. Charles Kershner, the editor of the *Student Printz*, however, published a photograph of Frazier on the front page followed by a short narrative explaining that Frazier had tried but failed to enroll at USM for the spring semester, but he would retry in the summer. When McCain heard about the story, he ordered the Dean of Men to confiscate all the papers. Security guards spread out across campus. Using the threat of arrest, they confiscated the newspapers from the *Student Printz* office and from a staffer who was delivering the papers to the Hub Student Center and the student bookstore. Guards even stopped students walking across campus to snatch papers from their hands and interrupted classes to wrench the newspapers from students and professors who had already retrieved copies. The papers were burned at the

⁶² Quoting J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, January 31, 1977, vol. 375, 34; *Ibid.*, 32-34. "Frazier Says He'll Try Again for Summer Term," *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1964; "Negro Fails in 5th Bid At Southern," MSSC Report, SCR #1-70-23-1-1-1, MDAH; "USM Officials Expect No Trouble Monday," *Hattiesburg American*, March 6, 1964; Erle Johnson to President W. D. McCain, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers; John Frazier, speech, Social Justice Seminar, November 9, 2007, Compact Disc, Department of Mass Communications and Journalism, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg.

power plant. However, some staffers at the *Student Printz* managed to hide copies. After Frazier read one of the hidden copies, he sent a letter to Kershner to express his appreciation for the balanced reporting and to note that “the officials at your school may confiscate your paper, but they cannot confiscate your minds and your ability to think for yourselves.” Kershner kept the letter in a locked drawer in his office. A week later, someone broke into his desk and stole his letter.⁶³

Forrest County blacks responded to these white victories by protesting in other forms. In mid-April when the Department of Justice sought a permanent injunction against Theron Lynd to prohibit him from discriminating against prospective black voters, black locals flooded inside the courthouse to display their support of the federal case. Lynd’s attorney accused the department of presenting two-year-old applications before the court, and claimed that since that time, Lynd had complied with federal court orders. The lies infuriated Department of Justice attorney John Doar: “I tell this court that the Department of Justice is here because the defendant has flatly refused to register Negroes.” Doar alleged that Lynd had made marks on black applications so that he could distinguish black and white applications and ensure the rejection of the former. To prove that discrimination, Doar presented a series of black witnesses, who testified that Lynd had repeatedly failed them on the exams, despite their ability to interpret the constitution. In an effort to claim that Lynd did not discriminate, the defense paraded several educated whites before the court, including two professors from the University of Southern Mississippi, who claimed that Lynd had failed them, too. Doar knew they were planted

⁶³ Quoting Charles Kershner, speech, Symposium for Social Justice, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, November 9, 2007, 5, Charles Kershner Papers, McCain, USM; *Ibid.*, 3-6. “Frazier’s Attempt to Matriculate is Unsuccessful,” *The Student Printz*, March 20, 1964; “Student Printz Issues Confiscated,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 20, 1964.

witnesses in cahoots with the white patriarchs. He unveiled the charade when he elicited from several illiterate whites testimony that Lynd had registered them, even though they could not read their own applications. The district court withheld judgment for nine months. The discrimination continued.⁶⁴

By mid-April 1964, it seemed that nonviolent massive resistance was working. Despite the Lynd case, the Freedom Days, and the massive registration drives across the state in the winter and spring of 1964, the white establishment had kept the majority of blacks from registering. According to the Southern Regional Council Second Annual Report, Mississippi blacks faced greater resistance via “intimidation and violence” than in all of the other Southern states combined. In two years, the Voter Education Project had only managed to add 3,871 blacks to Mississippi voter rolls, “a figure lower than the results of a single small city like Brunswick or Decatur, Georgia, or Winston Salem, North Carolina.” Mississippi’s black registration in 1964 had increased only slightly to 6.6 percent of the eligible black voters in the state.⁶⁵

Undeterred by the success of the white patriarchs at stymieing the revolt, COFO and SNCC planned a new campaign to combat black disfranchisement in Mississippi as part of their new Mississippi project: Operation Freedom Summer. Months earlier, in November 1963, the need for manpower, as well as greater media interest, had inspired

⁶⁴ Quoting “Lynd Takes Stand in Discrimination Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 14, 1964; “Lynd Hearing Resumes Friday,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 1964; “Parade of Witnesses Continues in Lynd case,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 15, 1964; “Lynd Injunction Hearing Ends,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 17, 1964; *US v. Theron Lynd*.

⁶⁵ Statement of Charles Evers before the United States Commission on Civil Rights in Jackson, Mississippi, February 17, 1965, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers].

Bob Moses and Allard Lowenstein to propose a project in which they would recruit 1,000 predominantly white college students to participate in voter registration campaigns and teach in Freedom Schools to politicize local blacks and bring massive national visibility to the Movement. The proposal initiated a passionate and controversial debate, as some influential activists opposed the suggestion. They feared that inserting whites into the Movement on a massive scale would diminish the ability of activists to focus on organizing local blacks and developing indigenous leadership. Others like Bob Moses and Fannie Lou Hamer insisted that segregation within the Movement proved hypocritical and unacceptable. Dave Dennis emphasized that white America paid little attention to the beatings and killings of blacks. Yet if a white college student were to die while working for civil rights in Mississippi, the nation would respond. During a January meeting in Hattiesburg, COFO voted in favor of recruiting whites for the summer project and spent much of the spring preparing for it.⁶⁶

Throughout the spring, COFO and SNCC staff members developed two significant venues to attack black disfranchisement during Operation Freedom Summer—the reintroduction of the Freedom Vote and the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The Freedom Vote, a statewide election paralleling the regular Mississippi elections, would show that the largely disfranchised 425,000 black eligible voters would vote if permitted to practice their constitutional right. Citizens participating in the Freedom Vote were held to the state registration stipulations such as proof of residence and eligible age, and demonstration of “good moral character,” but the COFO/SNCC staff eliminated literacy tests and poll tax requirements. The staff recruited

⁶⁶ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 96-100, 108-110; Dittmer, *Local People*, 208-210; 218-220.

locals to serve as registrars under the supervision of County Board of Registrars and established polls at churches and barber shops. Activists canvassed the black community and invited people to register for the Freedom Vote, and participants received a registration card, which they could present in the fall to vote in the freedom elections.⁶⁷

Simultaneously, COFO developed the MFDP, an official parallel Democratic Party, which utilized official procedures and channels to run civil rights candidates Victoria Gray, Fannie Lou Hamer, Reverend John Cameron, and James Houston for the U. S. Congress in the Democratic primary that June. On April 10, Victoria Gray became the first black woman to run for the U. S. Senate after the Mississippi Secretary of State begrudgingly recognized her as the MFDP candidate. When all of the MFDP candidates lost in the primaries on June 2, they tried to run as independents, but the Mississippi State Board of Elections denied their request. Undaunted, MFDP members elected delegates to send in August to the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City at which they would request the Credential Committee to seat them over the Regular Democrats. To that end, MFDP, COFO, and SNCC workers collected evidence to prove that the Regulars had violated the Fifteenth Amendment suffrage rights of Mississippi blacks when they had used violence and intimidation and other unlawful means to deny them their right to participate in the election of their delegates. To acquire such evidence, local blacks tried to participate in the Regular Democratic precinct, county, and state conventions. On June 16, a Forrest County resident, Peggy Jean Gould Connor, and seven other black registered voters traveled to the Hattiesburg Library to attend the

⁶⁷ Quoting Steve Max, "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: Background and Development," 6, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers; *Ibid.*, 1-9; "What is COFO? Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations," COFO Publication, 1964, vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers.

precinct convention meeting. The acting chairman, John Wallace, after contacting Lynd to check their registration status, refused to allow any of the black attendees but Connor to participate. He claimed the others had not paid their poll taxes, a stipulation the Democratic Party did not impose on whites. Moreover, Wallace allowed all the whites to participate without determining their registration status. Activists capitalized on such incidents of unlawful exclusion to bolster their case in Atlantic City.⁶⁸

The White Knights watched the rising Mississippi Movement with rage and considered plans for Operation Freedom Summer the gravest threat yet to the South's racial order. Bowers decided the time had arrived for the White Knights to declare war on the enemy. Before the onslaught of Freedom Summer, the White Knights, who had spent much of the winter and early spring organizing their violent counterrevolution, exploded onto the scene with a series of assaults. On April 24, the Klan launched its terror campaign by burning crosses in towns and cities all over Mississippi. Klansmen set two crosses on fire in Hattiesburg—one in front of the Forrest County Courthouse where blacks had held their Freedom Day demonstrations and one behind the University of Southern Mississippi likely because of the recent efforts of Frazier to desegregate it. The Klan also targeted white locals and white-owned businesses that they considered treasonous to white supremacy. For two weeks in late April and early May, Klansmen burned crosses on the lawn of the *Laurel Leader-Call*. It seems that they targeted the newspaper office because the editor and publisher, J. W. West, was not from Laurel and because, though a segregationist, he opposed violence. West refused to cower or even

⁶⁸ Quoting "What is COFO: Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations"; Sandy Leigh, interview; Steve Max, "The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party"; "Negro Woman Qualifies for Mississippi Senate Seat," press release, April 10, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Mississippi: How Negro Democrats Fared (Part I), June 16, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 5, PBJ Papers.

respond to the Klan threats. At first, local whites tried to downplay the emergence of the White Knights. The *Hattiesburg American* contended that communists had infiltrated SNCC, CORE, and SCLC and tried to incite violence and then blame it on “white terror.”⁶⁹ Of course, the cross burnings were just the beginning of the terror about to explode across Mississippi.

At 1:38 a.m. on May 10, Laurel policemen, W. Cade and P. Craven, drove their regular patrol down Ellisville Boulevard when they heard an explosion and immediately raced toward the sound. They noticed gray smoke billowing from the backside of the *Laurel Leader-Call* building and called the fire department. The explosion had blown out several windows and damaged paper rolls but failed to destroy the intended target—the paper press. The following day, Laurel’s Mayor A. S. Scott, called the bombing a “cowardly” and “dastardly act” and requested aid from the FBI. Scott promised that if police found the outlaws, authorities would prosecute them.⁷⁰

Because the FBI did not trust the police to launch a thorough probe into the bombing, agents took over the investigation immediately. Chief of Police L. C. Nix and Captain T. E. Myers sent 10 pieces of evidence from the crime scene to the FBI crime laboratory. Agents suspected Klan involvement and focused much of their investigation on Bowers. During an interview with agents on May 15, Bowers denied having any knowledge of the bombing. Although Bowers admitted membership in the John Birch

⁶⁹ Quoting “Communists and Racial Strife,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 21, 1964; “Leader-Call Hit by Big Explosion,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1964; “Crosses Burn Here and All over State,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 25, 1964; Laurel White Knights, *The Citizen - Patriot*, n. d., Segregation and Integration Miscellaneous Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville.

⁷⁰ Quoting “Leader-Call Hit By Big Explosion,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1964. Offense Report, Laurel Police Department, complainant J. W. West, serial no. 15206, May 10, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

Society and acknowledged that he opposed integration and the leftist leanings of the federal government, he claimed that he had never belonged to the White Knights. Agents noticed that Bowers appeared “extremely agitated and delivered information as though he were making a speech.”⁷¹

Days after the bombing, West addressed the people of Laurel in an editorial. He expressed shock and outrage that a group of outlaws sought to silence the media. The bombers, he declared, had violated one of the most treasured rights of the American people, “the freedom of the press.” He contended that Americans often read about such efforts in “strange isolated parts of the world,” but they never believed such violations of human rights could occur in the United States. He wondered why someone would target the *Laurel Leader-Call*, noting that the paper had always lauded Laurel as “one of the most God-fearing best cities in the country as site for new industry, as a place for the safety of children, and a city where races have lived side by side in peace despite violence everywhere.”⁷²

The Klansmen fired back in their publication, *The Citizen – Patriot*. They claimed: “since [West] first came into our midst several years ago as the local agent of the infamous International Syndicate which now owns and maintains control over the once-honest, Laurel Leader-Call, West has continuously stirred up trouble and fostered agitation in our peaceful community.” They speculated that either West had engaged in a

⁷¹ Quoting FBI Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115; SAC Jackson to Director (Hoover), April 23, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-186, both in Helfrich Papers. L. C. Nix and T. E. Myers to J. Edgar Hoover & FBI Laboratory, May 11, 1964 and Gwin Cole and Rex Armistead, Mississippi Bureau of Identification Case Report, May 14, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

⁷² Jay West, “Your Heritage Is In Jeopardy,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1964.

“criminal conspiracy” and bombed the building in an effort to acquire sympathy from the people, or he had aggravated “impetuous American Patriots, who have been provoked into understandable but foolish retaliation against the operation of a Communist Newspaper in their community.” The Klansmen beseeched the people to eradicate West’s depraved influence on Laurel by refusing to purchase his paper, thus forcing him to sell the enterprise to local owners. Finally, they threatened that “this bombing is but a small sample of what will happen again and again if we do not purge ourselves of this malignant cancer in our midst.”⁷³

The Klan had many friends in Laurel who shared its hostility toward the federal government and civil rights activism. Members of an anti-communist organization, the Jones County Americanism Committee, complained to Representative William Colmer about the FBI’s investigation of the *Laurel Leader-Call* bombing. The FBI, they declared, focused on “one group,” of white people whom they interrogated without first informing them of their rights. The committee noted that many people in Jones County believed that blacks actually bombed the building as a publicity stunt, and they wondered then why the FBI had only interrogated one black person. Moreover, the committee argued that the dispatching of some 30 to 40 agents—which far surpassed the number of Laurel police in the entire city—proved excessive and suggested that a conspiracy lurked beneath the agents’ arrival. It accused the federal government and blacks of engaging in a “masterplan” [sic] whereby agents could claim the disintegration of law and order to justify the entrance of federal troops to restore peace. The committee urged Colmer to demand an investigation of the agents to restore true law and order. It also warned that if their representatives failed to act and the federal government pursued its oppressive

⁷³ Laurel White Knights, *The Citizen – Patriot*.

interrogations, some of the interrogated persons might react with violence.⁷⁴

Violence would come no matter the response of Mississippi representatives. Bowers perceived Operation Freedom Summer as the pivotal battle in the racial war. He declared to his Klansmen: “the military and political situation as regards to the enemy has now reached the crisis state,” and the majority of Klan leaders agree “that the events which will occur in Mississippi this summer may well determine the fate of Christian Civilization for centuries to come.” Hoping to win the summer battle, Bowers developed a method of response and counterattack. Bowers theorized that the activists, federal troops, and communist propagandists would cooperate in a “pincer movement.” Blacks would participate en masse in street demonstrations in the interest of provoking “White militants into counter-demonstrations and open, pitched street battles, resulting in civil chaos and anarchy.” The attacks would create the “EXCUSE” for “Communist authorities in charge of the National Government” to declare Mississippi in a condition of “open revolt, with a complete breakdown of Law and Order.” In response, the federal government would declare “Martial Law, followed by a massive occupation of the State by Federal Troops, with all known Patriotic Whites placed under military arrest.” He warned that if these events occurred, the Klan would resist, but likely lose.⁷⁵

To prevent such a catastrophe, Bowers ordered Klansmen to avoid open confrontations with black activists. He suggested that one group of Klansmen volunteer to aid police and become “Legally Deputized” if possible. The other group should serve as a guerrilla warfare unit charged with the duty of destroying the “Headquarters” of the

⁷⁴ Quoting Jones County Americanism Committee to William Colmer, attached to Ingrid U. Cowan to William Colmer, June 22, 1964, William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM.

⁷⁵ “Imperial Executive Order, May 3, 1964, Klan Misc. Info., Helfrich Papers.

enemy. In addition, it must be prepared to act in emergency conditions with a counterattack against specified Klan targets, particularly the black leaders and their “white collaborators.” The Klan hoped to terrorize citizens into submission that summer. It codified its orders by assigning a number between one and four to communicate the severity of a project: number one symbolized a cross burning or other forms of harassment, number two—a whipping, number three—a burning or the shooting into a target’s home, and number four—murder. On June 15, arsonists—likely Klansmen—burned the auditorium of the Rosary Roman Catholic Church in Hattiesburg. Hours earlier, blacks had held a meeting in the church at which they discussed how to avoid violence during Freedom Summer. The attack was a small sample of the terrorism Klansman launched in an attempt to obliterate Freedom Summer.⁷⁶

Although the governor and state leaders also prepared to destroy Freedom Summer, they feared that Klan violence would advance rather than stymie the Civil Rights Movement. Because officials considered Hattiesburg’s response to Freedom Days successful, the state modeled its response plan after the Hub City’s nonviolent massive resistance methodology, which the state labeled “policed freedom of movement.” Governor Johnson encouraged citizens to remain calm because protestors could only thrive with media attention. Without it, their demonstrations would wither, and they would depart. He commanded the citizenry to allow the state and local authorities to

⁷⁶ Quoting “Imperial Executive Order, May 3, 1964. For classifications of Klan projects, see, *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998); FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol.1, #157-854-67, Helfrich Papers. Some FBI reports note a slight variance in classifying Klan projects. For example, some reports note that number 2 was a cross burning, and number 3 a beating, shooting, or a burning. A List of Mississippi Churches Destroyed or Damaged, September 16, 1964, vol. 58, Reel 21, CORE Papers; “Fire Guts Church Recreation Hall: Arson Appears Likely,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 16, 1964.

maintain law and order. In addition, Johnson asked legislators to permit municipalities that suffered from an influx of prisoners to send their excess prisoners to the state prison. Director of the State Sovereignty Commission Erle Johnston advised people to avoid the Klan and the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race. The *Hattiesburg American* enthusiastically supported the governor's strategy, noting that the method—since it did not produce violent clashes—deterred media attention and wore down the demonstrators.⁷⁷

The legislators granted Johnson's request, and under the "policed freedom of movement," Mississippi developed a series of strategies to fight the "army of agitators" and terminate the "threatened invasion." Governor Johnson created a powerful police force under his control to confront the expected racial conflicts. The new legislation provided the governor, state authorities, and city officials with substantial powers to suppress the Movement. The governor could issue police powers to the Mississippi Highway Patrol to suppress racial clashes, and he could add 200 new officers to the force. City fathers had the right to assign curfews and restrain people's movements, pool their resources to suppress mob violence, and raise fines and extend jail sentences for lawbreakers during crises. Municipalities that suffered from an influx of prisoners could send them to the state penitentiary. To discourage the involvement of federal authorities, the legislature made it unlawful to file false complaints with federal authorities and punished such violations with a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. In an effort to sustain an all-white jury system, particularly on civil rights cases, the

⁷⁷ Quoting "State Officials Develop Anti-violence Methods," *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 1964. "State Prepared for Influx of Students," *Hattiesburg American*, June 19, 1964; Kenneth Toller, "Governor Seeks Power for Patrol," *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; "Paul Says State Ready For Invasion," *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 14, 1964.

legislature ensured that juror qualifications would exclude blacks. The *Mississippi Free Press* noted that the legislature had effectively constructed a “police state.”⁷⁸ Actually, it had just legalized a system that already existed.

Moreover, unbeknownst to the civil rights activists, Commissioner of Public Safety T. B. Birdsong quietly developed the militant arm of the police state by implementing espionage programs, by encouraging mass arrests of activists under the rigid new laws, and by enforcing public obedience and conformity through intimidation. He called for each law enforcement community to establish an “intelligence network” in which they created a flow of information about their local Movement’s meeting places, goals, strategies and tactics and developed files on black leaders and outside agitators that included background and criminal record checks. The Department of Public Safety planned to collect photographs and fingerprints of every arrested activist and compile a “clearing house” of all agitators operating in Mississippi. To encourage mass arrests, Birdsong familiarized local and state officers with the laws they could use to suppress the Movement. He cautioned them, however, to avoid public scenes and jail uprisings, and he suggested that they arrest activists in a peaceful and swift manner and isolate leaders from regular activists in jail. To enforce public conformity, he recommended that officers host civic meetings to inform the public about the repercussions of disturbing the racial order. Finally, he suggested that law enforcement departments equip themselves with

⁷⁸ First quote, “State Officials Develop Anti-violence Methods,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 1964; second quote, “State Prepared for Influx of Students,” *The Hattiesburg American*, June 19, 1964; third quote, “Paul Says State Ready For Invasion,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, May 14, 1964; fourth quote, “Legislature Designs Police State,” *Mississippi Free Press*, June 20, 1964. Current Status of Mississippi Legislation, n. d., Matthew Zwerling Collection, McCain, USM. Kenneth Toller, “Governor Seeks Power for Patrol,” *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers.

“moving picture cameras, still cameras, bull horns, radio equipment (mobile and portable), tear gas, night sticks, riot guns and ammunition, helmets, bolt cutters, portable lighting equipment, and recording equipment” in order to suppress the Movement.⁷⁹

On the other side of the battle lines, Freedom Summer planners hoped to mitigate the impact of the oppression of the police state by soliciting protection from the federal government. In early June, Freedom Summer organizers held hearings in Washington D.C. at which parents of volunteers expressed their fears about the protection of their children in Mississippi. Black Mississippians, including many Forrest County residents, testified that they had suffered from voter discrimination and intimidation, terrorism, false arrests, and police brutality. The Freedom Summer planners sent a summary to President Johnson of the testimony along with a summation of Mississippi laws designed to suppress the Movement. They requested that the president dispatch a cadre of federal marshals to the state to protect citizens’ constitutional rights; implored him to order the Department of Justice to initiate action to enforce federal laws; and insisted that he call for the Civil Rights Commission to hold hearings throughout the summer to provide a record of evidence for future cases. They also requested that President Johnson meet with Governor Johnson to establish guidelines for the summer that would permit volunteers and activists to exercise their constitutional rights of peaceful demonstration and assembly, and to practice freedom of association by living in interracial communities. The federal government responded apathetically to these requests. It still refused to fully ally itself with the Movement, and its spotty intervention had not only created a permissive atmosphere for the state’s continued intransigence against federal court orders

⁷⁹ T. B. Birdsong to All Law Enforcement Officers, June 9, 1964, Charles Marx Papers, McCain, USM.

and civil rights legislation but also for the rise of the Klan.⁸⁰

As the spring battles concluded in the Central Piney Woods, activists and locals tended to their war wounds and prepared for another round of battles. Despite the Freedom Days campaign and clashes, the city fathers, through nonviolent repression in public arenas, managed to portray themselves in the nationwide media as peaceful segregationists and their town as moderate on the civil rights issues. Locals and Movement activists knew better. COFO described Hattiesburg as “deep-dyed conservative,” noting that despite its proximity to the “moderate” gulf coast cities and despite the presence of a sizeable university and a strong economic foundation in commerce and manufacturing in the town, the city “feels like a small, agrarian-oriented community.” After all, the University of Southern Mississippi had managed to sustain its segregated status regardless of Kennard’s crusade and demise and despite John Frazier’s numerous attempts to integrate it. Lynd continued to evade the U. S. Supreme Court’s order to terminate voting discrimination practices. As of June 9, only 15 percent of blacks who sought to register to vote in Forrest County had succeeded. Finally, Hattiesburg officials had survived the onslaught of Freedom Days without suffering any significant federal intervention, which in turn allowed them to fully sustain their Jim Crow system.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Summary of Major Points in Testimony By Citizens of Mississippi, June 8, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38; Harold Taylor to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, June 11, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38; Friends of Freedom to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 29, all in SNCC Papers. Dittmer, *Local People*, 237-240.

⁸¹ For interpretations of Forrest County as more racially moderate, see Dittmer, *Local People*, 179; James K. Dukes, speech, “Pursuing a Late Justice: The Prosecution of Mississippi’s Civil Rights Murders, Then and Now,” August 29, 2000, videocassette, McCain, USM. For COFO’s perspective of Hattiesburg and Forrest County, see Profiles of Typical Freedom Schools, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39; COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs*, Ser. 15, Reel 38, Summary of Major Points in Testimony by Citizens of Mississippi, Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers.

Still, Hattiesburg, as COFO noted, “has had a long, tough history of civil rights activity,” and locals refused to retreat without a fight. Lynd’s intransigence had failed to deter the black community that spring. For despite the dangers, the Hub City had become one of the “largest and most active” COFO projects in Mississippi with a powerful local core of adult and student activists participating in dissent. The Freedom Day demonstration, which turned into a three-month protest, proved a significant shift for the Movement in Mississippi, because it survived economic intimidation, arrests, and false prosecutions. While the nonviolent massive resistance prevented federal intervention and mass media attention, it also allowed COFO to organize the city with two MFDP candidates, 100 block captains, 15 citizenship teachers, and numerous canvassers, protesters, and ministers. Activism only intensified as Freedom Summer approached. Local blacks voiced a strong interest in sending their children to Freedom Schools; several ministers offered their church facilities for classes; and residents opened their doors to volunteers—ultimately providing housing for 110 summer volunteers in Hattiesburg alone. COFO expected Hattiesburg to serve as “one of the key centers of activity” during Freedom Summer.⁸²

As the spring of 1964 drew to a close, the revolutions and counterrevolutions produced no clear victor, and both sides regrouped for the summer. They developed new strategies and tactics and prepared their soldiers and home fronts for the struggle ahead. The outbreak of the black revolution had, at the least, terminated the uncontested rule of racial absolutism. The Age of Leviathan was over. COFO and SNCC leaders, after two years of organization, had finally recruited a powerful juggernaut of devoted locals to the

⁸² First and third quote, COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs*, Ser. 15, Reel 38; second quote, Profiles of Typical Freedom Schools, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, both in SNCC Papers.

infantry ranks and had launched a powerful offensive against the enemy. Nevertheless, the white establishment, through its nonviolent massive resistance, had prevented any significant federal response. The Freedom Summer organizers hoped the incorporation of nearly 1,000 young white students into their ranks would create greater visibility for the Movement and attract national empathy and federal intervention. They also needed to advance the process of localization—the “empowerment” of the local people. They understood that if they simply led a local struggle and then departed, the struggle would fade in their absence; but, if they organized communities and developed local leaders, who in turn, mobilized their towns, the struggle could survive and flourish long after their departure. They hoped Freedom Summer would achieve both goals, for only then could blacks win the war and destroy the white supremacist tyranny.⁸³

⁸³ Quoting Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 331; *Ibid.*, 332-334. COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs*, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers.

CHAPTER V:

INVASION: FREEDOM SUMMER

“Your great wall is cracking and crumbling to pieces. When it breaks we’ll be free; and when it does, Mississippi will be civilized and peaceful.”¹

—Judy G., Hattiesburg Freedom Summer student

On a sweltering July day in 1964, 12-year-old Larry McGill stifled his fear as he followed five black teenagers into the S. H. Kress department store in downtown Laurel and strode toward the “whites-only” lunch counter. White customers stared angrily at the black youths, as if daring them to stage a sit-in here in the heart of Klan country. McGill tried to calm himself by focusing on his training: If they beat you, curl into the “freedom knot” to protect your head and vital organs. He had practiced the knot many times at the COFO house. He tried to be brave, but he was the youngest of the group. It was his first sit-in. As McGill and the others approached the counter, the black server “eyeballed” them, in an effort to warn them away. The young activists ignored her, as they quietly arranged themselves on the stools. Within a few minutes, a white man ordered them to leave, but the oldest protestor, shot back, “leave for what?”

Seconds later, McGill saw 10 Klansmen, armed with baseball bats, rushing from the back of the restaurant toward them “like they knew we were coming.” At first, McGill froze in terror as the Klansmen yanked his friends off their stools and bludgeoned them with bats. Police Chief L. C. Nix witnessed the attack, but he refused to intervene, even as one of the Klansmen pulled 14-year-old Jerry Arrington off his stool and stabbed him. McGill panicked. He forgot his training, and rather than balling into the freedom

¹ Judy G., “Letters About Slavery,” *Freedom News*, 1 (July 23, 1964): 5, Sandra Adickes Papers, McCain Library and Archives, the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Adickes Papers and USM].

knot, he broke into tears and rushed toward the door; but the white men caught him and started pummeling him. When McGill wrestled free, another Klansman blocked his path and slammed his bat down hard against McGill's back. He shouted: "get out of here you little black monkey and don't come back." McGill burst outside, as downtown Laurel descended into "chaos." Blacks congregated on one side of the street, and whites on the other, while civil rights workers rushed toward the restaurant to usher out the remaining protestors. Amidst the mayhem, McGee's fear morphed into anger and humiliation. At the precipice of puberty, McGill coveted masculinity, and he was ashamed that he had run. Determined to prove his manhood, he organized another Kress sit-in later that week. Hundreds of other locals launched invasions of whites-only territory in the massive sit-in Movement that exploded across the Central Piney Woods in July 1964.²

Months before the July sit-ins, Freedom Summer organizers had developed two clear missions for Freedom Summer—mobilize the locals into an enduring Movement force and awaken the national conscience to the evils of Jim Crow to compel Washington

² Quoting Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. WATS Report, July 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SNCC Papers]; Samuel N. Craddock to SAC, New Orleans, July 29, 1964, Henry DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-1, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain Library and Archives, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers; and McCain Library and Archives cited as McCain, USM]; U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Law Enforcement: A Report On Equal Protection in the South* (Washington D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965) 46F, [hereinafter cited as Civil Rights Commission, *A Report on Equal Protection in the South*].

D. C. to intervene. To transform the black locals into freedom fighters with the ability to assume the full reins of the Movement, they employed a two-pronged approach. First, they mobilized adults to participate in registration drives, the Freedom Vote, and alternative political parties that challenged the white political monopoly. Second, they established Freedom Schools that decolonized the minds of the black youth from white supremacist control and channeled them toward revolutionary thinking. To draw white America's empathy, the organizers focused the national spotlight on racial injustice by incorporating nearly 1,000 white volunteers into their ranks; for in white America, only Caucasians could draw the continued interest of the media and the federal government, particularly if whites became victims of southern violence. The methodology worked. The mass influx of white volunteers and the Klan violence against whites in the summer of 1964 captivated the news media, which finally gave the Mississippi Movement the visibility it needed to turn the nation against Jim Crow and to force a federal intervention in the state. The stirring of the national conscience and mobilization of locals paved the way for an electrifying black assault on the absolutist state.³

The sit-ins proved particularly important because they marked a pivotal turning point in the Central Piney Woods by transforming the Movement from an attack on disfranchisement led by a cadre of veteran activists to a massive black invasion of Jim Crow's white world. No matter how many times whites attacked them, blacks returned to the front lines to occupy "whites-only" public spaces, and in these actions they publicly

³ COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs*, Ser. 15, Reel 38; "Part II: Introduction, Citizenship Curriculum," Ser. 15, Reel 39; "Mississippi Summer Freedom School Program," Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers. Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991 edition), 96, 98-100, 114.

reclaimed their humanity by refusing to bend to the will of white exclusion or the terror of police power. Although the picketers during Freedom Days had achieved a similar victory, the sit-ins spread across the Central Piney Woods and evoked public violence. Certainly, white violence against white volunteers received considerably more media coverage than violence against blacks, and it became the animating inspiration behind massive federal intervention. Still, as nationwide media brought images into living rooms across America of white brutality in the face of black nonviolence, they exposed the violent whites as depraved beasts and peaceful black activists as civilized freedom fighters. The reversal of racial images challenged centuries of racial mythologies and black stereotypes.⁴

Because whites would launch a myriad of massive counteroffensives and wield the totality of their power to repel the federal and black invasions and reinforce the police state, the Jim Crow system would survive the summer. Nevertheless, the white tyranny faced an ever growing legion of local blacks who sustained their resolve in the face of terror and massive repression. It also confronted an escalating federal intervention. By the close of the summer, the FBI would declare war on the Klan, and the federal government would increasingly use its power to enforce upon Mississippi its executive, judicial, and

⁴ Neil R. McMillen, "Street Theater and the Collapse of Jim Crow: How the Black Freedom Movement Outsmarted Mississippi Segregationists," *Mississippi History Now*, Mississippi Historical Society, <http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/articles/280/street-theater-and-the-collapse-of-jim-crow-how-the-black-freedom-movement-outsmarted-mississippi-segregationists>; John Herbers, "Civil Rights Drive Alters Mississippi," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1964, the New York Times Article Archive, [hereinafter cited as NYT Article Archive]; Claude Sitton, "Civil Rights Act: How South Responds," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1964, NYT Article Archive; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 150-154; "Civil Rights and the Walls Come Tumbling Down," July 17, 1964, *Time Magazine*, n. p., <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,875944,00.html> (accessed June 2010).

legislative will. The white patriarchs and the white masses would not surrender without a long protracted fight, but neither would black Mississippians. The summer of 1964 changed the course of the civil rights struggle in the Central Piney Woods and across the state from a revolt into a full-scale war. As teenage activist Jimella Stokes declared: “I knew that whatever happened, it would never go back. It would never be the same, after the summer.”⁵

At the onset of Freedom Summer, COFO had already mobilized some areas of the state including the Central Piney Woods, the Delta, and the Jackson area, and these beachheads became significant battlegrounds during Operation Freedom Summer. In Forrest County, hundreds of locals had offered to host activists and to send their children to Freedom Schools, which catapulted the Central Piney Woods into the heart of the Mississippi Movement. The legion of volunteers flooding into Hattiesburg spread out across Forrest County to strengthen the masses, and some of them moved into Laurel to galvanize the smaller cadres of SNCC, COFO, CORE, and NAACP activists to launch the Laurel Movement.⁶

Descended from the “Greatest Generation,” the mostly white volunteers abstractly understood the dangers they would confront in Mississippi, and they prepared to sacrifice, as their parents had in a time of war. Yet they fought their battles inside their

⁵ Quoting Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview by Patricia Boyett, January 9, 2009, MOHP recording. “Civil Rights Drive Alters Mississippi;” NTY Online Archive; Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970); McAdam, *Freedom Summer*; Carson, *SNCC*, 111-129; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 264-265.

⁶ Profiles of Typical Freedom Schools, n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 236.

own nation and as peaceful soldiers armed solely with a belief in the equality of humankind and an abiding, somewhat naïve, faith in their ability to transform their nation. For them, boot camp involved a nutshell examination of Jim Crow life, cursory training in nonviolent resistance, and instruction in the Freedom Summer program. They arrived in Mississippi with the innocence and optimism of yet unharmed soldiers dedicated to the cause of liberating the oppressed. The volunteers harbored great trepidation as they heard the stories about the preparations of their enemies, who despised them as profoundly as their Confederates forbearers had hated the invading Yankees. Mississippi instituted a multitude of laws to suppress their movement, their speech, and their associations. Most white citizens had developed contempt for the volunteers before ever catching a glimpse of them. In addition, the Klan planned to harm and if necessary, kill them. Before the volunteers completed their tour of duty, the enemy had baptized them in the horrors of battle. No one—not the volunteers nor the local insurrectionists nor the veteran activists—escaped unscathed, and some never escaped at all. During that summer, 1,000 of them endured arrests, 80 of them suffered beatings, scores of them witnessed brutal attacks and church burnings, and four returned home in coffins.⁷

⁷ For information on Freedom Summer volunteers in the Central Piney Woods, see Joseph Ellin Journal, transcript, May 6, June 7, 21, 26, 1964, Joseph & Nancy Ellin Freedom Summer Collection, Digital Archive, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Ellin Collection]; Sandra Adickes, “My Seven Year (H)itch: A Rambling, Discursive, Anecdotal History of the Evolution of a Radical Teacher,” Conference on Radicals in the Professions, Ann Arbor, Michigan, July 14-16, 1967, Adickes Papers; David Owen to Father and Mother, February 5, 1963, David Owen Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Owen Papers]; David Owen to Mom, Pop, and Slim, June 10, 1964, Owen Papers; Terri Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” transcript, Terri Shaw Freedom Summer Collection, Digital Archive, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Shaw Collection]. Terry Shaw, interview by Stephanie Scull Millet, June 7, 1999; Sandra Adickes, interview by Stephanie Scull Millet, both in MOHP Digital. For volunteers in Mississippi in general, see McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 3-10, 35-65; Dittmer, *Local*

The volunteers hailed from similar backgrounds and participated in Freedom Summer for similar reasons. Most were politically progressive white college students from elite universities and privileged backgrounds. They also shared a youthful and romantic idealism about the efficacy of their activist generation. Most of them perceived the Civil Rights Revolution as the moral battle of their era, though some of them also harbored motives of self-glorification. Before Joseph Ellin arrived in Hattiesburg with his wife Nancy, he admitted to himself that he desired “to do something that counts and that gains recognition for me.” Yet deeper motives also compelled him to join the Movement—his longing to participate in the reconciliation of the races; his desire to struggle against injustice; and his attraction to the passionate black community whose love and “intensity” seemed to render his middle-class experience vapid and “bloodless.” White guilt and a moral imperative to fight injustice motivated Terry Shaw too. As a child, she had felt uncomfortable “holding hands with black children” during interracial events at her Unitarian Church. She became aware of the evils of racism through her parents’ teachings and her own high school experience abroad in Guatemala where racial relations seemed more fluid. During her collegiate days at Antioch College in Ohio, she joined the NAACP. She left her job at a Buffalo, New York newspaper to participate in Freedom Summer. David Owen, inspired both by his juvenile thirst for adventure and his

People, 242-246; Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 3-8. For Mississippi’s perception of the volunteers, see T. B. Birdsong to All Law Enforcement Officers, June 9, 1964, Charles Marx Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Marx Papers]; “State Officials Develop Anti-violence Methods,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 1964; “Legislature Designs Police State,” *Mississippi Free Press*, June 20, 1964; “Imperial Executive Order,” May 3, 1964, Klan Miscellaneous Information, Helfrich Papers. For statistics on violence of Freedom Summer, see Mary Aiken Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers, 1964-1965* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 58.

altruistic conscience, chose Mississippi over the Peace Corps, despite his parents' protestations. Owen informed his parents that as they had instilled in him a "social conscience" that inspired him to better his nation, he could no longer sit idly among the apathetic masses of his race while dictatorial oppression existed in his country.⁸

During the last two weeks of June, Owen, Shaw, and the Ellins flocked with hundreds of others to Oberlin College in Ohio where the Freedom Summer organizers held their primary orientation. The project organizers tried to prepare the volunteers for the terror zone they would soon enter. Shaw found many parallels between the Mississippi project and "a military operation." Of course, unlike soldiers, the volunteers learned nothing of weaponry and killing, but rather acquired training in nonviolent opposition. Veteran activists, who had suffered under white terrorism, taught the volunteers how to protect their "vital organs" when attacked, and how to respond to the gathering of a mob. They also incessantly repeated the rules in the COFO "Security Handbook," until they became mantras: never reveal the address of your host; never congregate in doorways or porches; never sleep near windows; and never travel alone or at night or without informing the COFO office of travel plans. The Freedom Summer organizers struggled to divest the volunteers of their perilous naiveté before they sent them off to battle, but they also rallied their morale. The veterans perceived the summer as a decisive battle in the racial war. As one COFO worker declared, "the danger now is

⁸ First, second, and third quotes, Joseph Ellin Journal, May 6, June 7, 21, 26, 1964, Ellin Collection; fourth quote, Terry Shaw, interview; fifth quote, David Owen to Father and Mother, February 5, 1963, Owen Papers. McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 46-49. Dittmer, *Local People*, 244.

greater than it ever has been—and so is our hope.”⁹

Klansmen across Mississippi were fully prepared to destroy that hope and attack the invaders when they began appearing in Mississippi in late June. The White Knights held several meetings before Freedom Summer at which they prepared battle plans against the invasion of their state. On June 7, 300 Mississippi Klansmen flocked to a statewide meeting at the abandoned Old Boykin Methodist Church in Smith County. Klan leaders, fearing that law enforcement or other uninvited interlopers might spy on the meeting, implemented intense security measures. Two planes circled a wide radius around the church keeping constant surveillance of the area, while 12 mounted guards and several foot sentries conducted ground watches below. Bowers and his top echelon feared most the Klansmen among them who might become informants. Armed guards prohibited Klansmen from leaving the church until the meeting concluded, and leaders warned that the Invisible Empire would punish treason with execution.¹⁰

At least one informant stood among his fellow Klansmen that day. He was a member of the Laurel Klavern, known in FBI circles as 1257-R. He listened as Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers ordered his White Knights to track the movements and actions of the agitators and wait for them to violate Mississippi laws. Such disobedience, Bowers declared, empowered Klansmen with the “right to kill them.” Despite such bold statements, many Klan leaders, including Bowers, worried about an aggressive federal response to Klan violence. They warned the rank-and-file to avoid daylight action against

⁹ First and second quotes, Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; third quote, COFO, *Mississippi: Handbook for Political Programs; Security Handbook*, n. d., Zoya Zeman Collection, McCain, USM. Dittmer, *Local People*, 244.

¹⁰ FBI Memo to SAC, from SA Stephen W. Callendar, July 10, 1964, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-34, Helfrich Papers.

activists and ordered them to allow the police to suppress civil rights activities. Only under the cover of night should they launch assault operations. As of early June, some 97 projects were planned by the White Knights. During a Laurel meeting in early June, 1257-R listened as Lawrence Byrd called for the klavern to find the names and addresses of those locals hosting volunteers and then plan drive-by ambushes.¹¹

On June 21, the terror of Freedom Summer commenced over 100 miles northeast of Hattiesburg when three civil rights workers investigating a church burning in Neshoba County, Mississippi vanished. The case would have likely generated little interest in white America, if James Chaney, a black CORE staff member from nearby Meridian, had been the only man to disappear. Two of the missing men, however, were young, middle-class whites from New York—Michael Schwerner, a CORE staff member working in the state since January, and Andrew Goodman, a Freedom Summer volunteer who had arrived in Mississippi the day before. The nation reacted with shock and rage, which forced the federal government to respond. President Lyndon Baines Johnson ordered former CIA director, Allen Dulles, and Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, to solve the Neshoba case, and he acquired assurances from Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr. that he would fully cooperate with the investigation. Hoover reestablished an FBI office in Jackson and flooded the state with agents. The president sent Hoover to the dedication ceremony in Jackson on *Air Force One* to communicate the significance of the

¹¹ Quoting Stephen W. Callendar to SAC, July 10, 1964, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-34; Stephen M. Callender to SAC New Orleans, July 1, 1964, Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-15; Stephen M. Callendar, to SAC New Orleans, June 29, 1964, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-13; FBI Report, June 26, 1964, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-12, all in Helfrich Papers.

Mississippi office and the Mississippi mission.¹²

The FBI began the investigation with a narrow task: solve the MIBURN (Mississippi burning) case as they called the Neshoba disappearances—which angered civil rights leaders. At the dedication ceremony of the Mississippi office, Hoover reiterated the long-standing Bureau policy regarding the Movement: the FBI was “purely an investigative organization.” Local authorities remained responsible for preventing violence and protecting the people. The FBI sent agents to solve a missing persons case, not dismantle the white supremacist political system. For years, activists had watched apathetic agents stand idly by while whites committed atrocious crimes against blacks. Although black activists appreciated that the FBI had at least launched an investigation, it also insulted them. SNCC leader John Lewis emphasized that “it is a shame that national outrage is aroused only after two white boys go missing.”¹³

Mississippi whites were also hostile to the FBI and the media. They fought back against negative national media coverage with a mass propaganda campaign. Many whites in Mississippi, including Jay West, the publisher of the *Laurel Leader-Call*, accused the volunteers or “invaders” as he called them, of staging the disappearance of the three civil rights activists to draw the FBI to the state and to reverse the racial order. Whites across the Central Piney Woods insisted that local blacks were content subjects

¹² Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 86-88; Carson, *In Struggle*, 114-115; Belfrage, *Freedom Summer*, 11-12; Dittmer, *Local People*, 246-252; “J. Edgar Hoover Arrives in State,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 1964.

¹³ First quote, Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 87-88; last quote, Carson, *In Struggle*, 115. Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 27; “Killed by the Klan,” prod. and dir. Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette.

who adored the white master race. The invasion of the Yankee volunteers and COFO staff, whom they described as “oversexed, beatnik, dupes of the communist conspiracy,” upset the harmonious balance of their racially ordered world by inciting a few of the more “immoral” blacks to demand their civil rights. As local whites generally perceived the civil rights struggle through the prism of white supremacist ideologies such as the black beast myth, they believed that some depraved black males hoped the Movement would help them fulfill their fantasies of raping white women and relied on the outside agitators to lead a black coup and deliver them the spoils of war.¹⁴

Across the Central Piney Woods, conservative and radical whites disagreed on how to protect southern white womanhood and their homeland from the invasion. Hattiesburg reporter Dudley Le Hew supported the conservative response when he implored the white citizenry to support Governor Johnson’s nonviolent massive resistance strategy, modeled after Hattiesburg’s approach during Freedom Days. LeHew argued that just as the “policed freedom of movement,” had decreased media focus on the Hub City during Freedom Days, the state would prevent violent incidents that elicited sensational-driven media attention during Freedom Summer. The lack of publicity would curtail federal intervention, which would sap the Movement of its strength. The strategy might have worked, but the radical whites in the White Knight klaverns in the Central Piney Woods had no intention of employing nonviolent tactics. From the moment the volunteers arrived, Klansmen kept surveillance on them, developed targets, and met deep in the woods to plan attacks. To intimidate volunteers, they displayed their guns as they

¹⁴ First quote, Jay West, “President Should Halt Our ‘Long, Hot Summer’” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 26, 1964; second quote, Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection.

circled the COFO office and followed canvassers in black neighborhoods. The day Terry Shaw arrived in Hattiesburg, as a truck passed by the COFO office, a white man hurled a booklet full of white supremacist hate material at the door. The volunteers became familiar with their faces, but not their identities because the Klan vehicles rarely had license plates.¹⁵ Volunteers became accustomed to living with fear, just as they adapted to impoverished housing standards.

At first sight, Shaw noticed that Hattiesburg appeared like any other American town with paved roads shaded by tall trees leading from one typical suburban neighborhood to the next. Then, they crossed the tracks into the black section of town where the paved roads ended. As the volunteers gazed out their windows while lumbering across the now dirt roads, they experienced shock at the poverty and dearth of amenities. Not a single street light or a sewer could be found in the black quarters and railroad crossings lacked gates, signals, and bells. The volunteers soon learned that the black area suffered from tremendous floods when it rained because the city had failed to build drainage systems in black neighborhoods. Although few blacks possessed vehicles, everyone had chickens and roosters roaming about. It reminded volunteer Nancy Ellin of the ramshackle homes and odors of impoverished India. Her husband Joseph labeled black Hattiesburg “a middle-income slum.” Volunteers found Forrest County’s poorest black section, Palmers Crossing, even worse. Three miles outside of the Hub City, the

¹⁵ “State Officials Develop Anti-violence Methods,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 1964; Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection. For examples of plans for Klan violence, see Stephen W. Callendar to SAC, July 10, 1964, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-34; Stephen M. Callender to SAC New Orleans, July 1, 1964, Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-15; Stephen M. Callendar, to SAC New Orleans, June 29, 1964, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-13; FBI Report, June 26, 1964, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-12, all in Helfrich Papers.

dying village featured a sawmill on one side, several small farms on the other, dilapidated homes, a few churches, a school, and a smattering of white-owned businesses. Volunteers became intimately familiar with sponge baths and chamber pots, as few homes had indoor plumbing. In Forrest and Jones counties, David Owen eventually grew accustomed to the porches one treaded on carefully to avoid breaking the rotting wood, but few adapted well to the army of insects that lived among them. One volunteer was horrified by the “fleets” of mice-sized cockroaches.¹⁶

Black residents viewed their communities quite differently. Although they resented the city’s failure to appropriate equal funding for their public services and roads, they adored their vibrant, tidy, hard working, and beloved communities. They expressed great pride in their bustling business centers on Mobile Street in Hattiesburg, and on Front Street in Laurel. They took great care of their homes and gardens, always tending to them and helping their neighbors. They loved their close knit communities that operated like a communal village and took pride in their schools and churches. They had much to teach the volunteers, who hailed from communities many local blacks would have considered, cold, austere, and detached and who knew nothing of the pride earned by collectively surviving hardships.¹⁷

¹⁶ Quoting Joseph Ellin to [?] July 3, 1964, Ellin Collection; second quote, Joseph Schwartz to Bea and Isaac, n. d., Joseph Schwartz Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Schwartz Papers]. Nancy Ellin to Mr. and Mrs. Ellin June 30, 1964; Joseph Ellin to the Editor of the Gazette, July 10, 1964; Joseph Ellin to the Editor of the [*Kalamazoo Gazette*], August 1, 1964, all in Ellin Collection. Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; Ginny Glass Mississippi Diary, August 11, 12, 1964, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Glass Diary]; David Owen to Mom, Pop, and Rat Fink, July 2, 1964, Owen Papers.

¹⁷ Larry McGill, interview. Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Preyor, interview, September 26, 2008; Cheryl Outlaw, interview, October 2, 2008; Douglass T. Baker,

Despite the racial and class divides so obviously present at the onset of the summer, most local blacks welcomed the volunteers with excitement and hope. They expressed their gratitude with their time and money, and by opening their homes, businesses, and lives to these strangers. Arthur Siggers, a teenager during the Movement era, recalled, “Nearly everybody was involved in the Movement one way or another . . . whether openly or clandestinely everybody wanted something better, wanted change.” Several women washed the volunteers’ clothes, and another lady opened her bathtub to volunteers living in Palmers Crossing where locals generally lacked indoor plumbing. Sigger’s mother, a domestic in white homes, and Jeanette Smith, the wife of a physician were two of hundreds of locals who fed the volunteers. Certainly, blacks who worked for whites like Mrs. Siggers, often had to remain in the background to keep their jobs and feed their families. Women like Smith, whose husband depended on black patients for his family’s livelihood, took on more public responsibilities, like signing property bonds to bail activists out of jail. Blacks of all classes donated their money to the struggle. During a service at Truelight Baptist Church, attended by several volunteers, the minister asked congregants for donations for Freedom Summer, and reminded his parishioners that the activists were “angels unawares.” The parishioners gave all they could.¹⁸

interview, September 24, 2008; Eddie Holloway, interview, September 30, 2008, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. Cleveland Payne, *Laurel: A History of the Black Community, 1882-1962* (Laurel, Mississippi: C. Payne, 1990), 25-37.

¹⁸ First quote, Arthur Siggers, interview, by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording; second quote, Freedom Summer Journal of Sandra Adickes, transcript, July 5, 1964, Adickes Paper, [hereinafter cited as Adickes Journal, Adickes Papers]. Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection.

Many locals who hosted volunteers had participated in the struggle since Freedom Days and some for nearly two decades. Hosts along with the new local recruits hoped the largely white volunteers would bring greater visibility to the Movement and invigorate federal intervention. A host in Palmer's Crossing, Mrs. McCullim, had tried to register five times and hoped volunteers like her guest, Jinny Glass, would force change. As she told Glass: "We was sure waiting for you." Daisy Harris, who hosted Paula Pace and Beth Moore, noted that when the volunteers arrived, "we felt like we had some friends. Everybody didn't hate us." Freedom Summer student Cheryl Outlaw adored the volunteers who stayed with her relatives in her East Jerusalem community because, "it was like they came to our rescue. . . . That's why I've never forgotten them."¹⁹ The Movement blossomed quickly that summer in Forrest County as Freedom Days had galvanized the tenuous local struggle and Freedom Summer inspired mass participation.

In Jones County, volunteers faced greater obstacles as COFO, SNCC, and CORE had made few inroads into the area and lacked a strong home base. At the beginning of Freedom Summer, organizers had yet to find blacks in Laurel willing to host volunteers; so all the volunteers assigned to the Central Piney Woods initially stayed in Hattiesburg. After a few days, SNCC leaders assigned three black activists, including Gwendolyn Robinson, to penetrate Laurel and find hosts willing to house them. They warned them, however, that they must complete their mission in a "clandestine" manner because Laurel

¹⁹ First quote, Glass Diary, August 13, 1964; second quote, Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording; third and fourth quotes, Cheryl Outlaw, interview. Sandy Leigh, interview by Anne Romaine, November 7, 1966, Shelia Michaels Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Michaels Papers]. Nancy and Joseph Ellin to Mr. and Mrs. Ellin, June 30, 1964; Joseph Ellin to Mom and Dad, July 29, 1964; Nancy Ellin to [?], July 9, 1964, all in Ellin Collection. Shaw, "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection; Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, interview; Jeanette Smith, interview.

was a dangerous town, certainly too dangerous for SNCC to send white volunteers. Robinson found the special protection offered white volunteers irritating. After all, the Freedom Summer organizers had predominantly focused on recruiting middle-class whites to serve in Mississippi that summer precisely because white America had failed to “value black life,” which she understood to mean that if a white person was harmed in the struggle, the nation would take notice and respond. Still, Robinson and her colleagues accepted the assignment and drove into Laurel with one particularly important name—Susie Ruffin who had been heavily involved with the state NAACP. When they arrived at her home, Ruffin sent her to Eberta Spinks.²⁰

When Spinks opened the door to Robinson and learned that she was a COFO volunteer, she gazed at her with great hope and said, “Girl, I’ve been waiting on you all my life. Come on in.” From the moment Spinks and Robinson met, the Laurel project began to take flight. Spinks’ three-bedroom house filled with dozens of volunteers that overflowed from the beds and couches to sleeping bags on the floor. Robinson and other volunteers mobilized the community, and when blacks grew discouraged or frightened, Spinks recalled, “we sat here and sang freedom songs ‘till we almost got happy.” Eventually, COFO sent Marion Davidson, a white Hattiesburg volunteer, to Laurel to help establish an office. Davidson and the volunteers opened a COFO office in a church basement, but after a week the church evicted them. Undeterred, they reestablished their center in a local woman’s backyard until they acquired land and a wooden trailer where

²⁰ Quoting Gwendolyn [Robinson] Zoharah Simmons, interview, *The Veterans of Hope Project*, <http://www.veteransofhope.org/show.php?vid=32&tid=13&sid=44#> (accessed July 2009). COFO Volunteer Lists, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, Sovereignty Commission Record #s 2-166-3-37-14-1-1 and 2-150-1-10-7-1-1, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Digital Archive, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR#, MDAH].

they opened a community center. Mayor A. S. Scott, however, evicted them because the trailer lacked running water and bathroom facilities. Finally, a resident allowed COFO to rent from him an old home large enough to house an office, a residence for workers, a library, a community center, and a freedom schoolhouse. Organizers hoped that from a stable base, they could finally galvanize the Laurel project.²¹

In Hattiesburg, the COFO office located on Mobile Street served as the brain center of the Movement in the Central Piney Woods from which staff and volunteers coordinated and recorded all the activities occurring in the field, the schools, and the community centers. Terry Shaw served as the communications coordinator responsible for gathering intelligence, managing the office, keeping records of activity, providing law clerk services, and fostering positive public relations. Shaw also struggled to manage the FBI, Department of Justice, local police, and the media. Shaw frequently worked 15 hours a day in the often frantic, always hot, and generally “nerve-wracking” office that was constantly deluged with Movement participants including activists, volunteers, lawyers, doctors, folk singers, and prominent visitors.²²

The voter registration project served as the heart of Operation Freedom Summer, as black suffrage remained the great hope for change. Only with political power could locals initiate a political revolution. To mobilize as many local blacks as possible, Hattiesburg Project Director Sandy Leigh divided 16 voter registration volunteers into

²¹ First and second quotes, Gwendolyn Simmons interview; third quote, Eberta Spinks, interview by Kim Adams, Spring 1995, MOHP Digital. “Flintridge Woman in South as Civil Rights Worker,” *La Canada Valley Sun*, October 8, 1964, Owen Papers. For Marion Davidson, see Davidson, Marion, Herbert Randall, Freedom Summer Photographs, McCain, USM.

²² Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; Joseph Ellin, to Mom and Dad, July 29, 1964, Ellin Collection.

four groups of canvassers composed of one captain and three team members to work in four precincts—Palmer's Crossing, the Library Precinct, Walthall, and Buton. Each volunteer paired off with local recruits, as well as a cleric from the Minister's Project, and block captains established during Freedom Days. As the summer progressed, COFO expanded voter canvassing to Laurel. Six days a week, canvassers spread out across the main arteries of black communities in Forrest and Jones counties, and for eight hours a day, they trudged across dusty roads in the thick heat from home to home, imploring locals to register to vote. They also encouraged them to register in the Freedom Book so they could participate in the parallel MFDP election of delegates to send to the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. The MFDP planned to challenge the credentials of the Regular Democrats on the grounds that since they had denied blacks their Fifteenth Amendment right to vote, they could not legally represent Mississippi. The MFDP held parallel precinct, county, district, and state conventions open to all Mississippians regardless of race.²³

Initially, several canvassers found their work laborious and frustrating. As they moved into neighborhoods and backcountry homes untouched by the Movement, they experienced a sense of futility. Blacks expressed interest in the Movement, but fear of reprisals deterred them from registering. Generally, locals, bred with southern hospitality, invited the canvassers into their home, but their association would often end with that

²³ Sandy Leigh to Bob Moses, Report from Hattiesburg, July 8-14, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Steve Max, The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: Background and Development, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers; Joseph Ellin, to the Editor of the [*Kalamazoo Gazette*], August 1, 1964, Ellin Collection; David Owen, to Mom, Pop, and Rat Fink, July 2, 1964, Owen Papers; "What is COFO? Mississippi: Structure of the Movement and Present Operations," COFO Publication, vol. 126, Reel 25, Congress of Racial Equality Archives, Papers, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter as CORE Papers].

visit. Others promised to register just so the canvassers would leave, but they never made the trip to the courthouse. During his first day of canvassing, Owen handed a man a flyer advertising a mass meeting. Although the man pretended to read it, Owen noticed that he was holding it upside down. Owen suddenly felt alienated from the world he had come to change, for he realized that the Mississippi literacy test would always keep power in the hands of the white elite. He also grew despondent as he watched the terror that crept over the faces of black children when he neared them. They never looked him in the eye, and they called him “sir” no matter how many times he beseeched them to use his first name. Some white volunteers believed that poor local blacks lacked the education to understand their oppression and, consequently, the will to fight it. Others passively accepted their status. Yet these views reflected white misunderstanding of black life under Jim Crow.²⁴

Many local blacks viewed all whites, including the volunteers, with suspicion. Consequently, in their presence, they disguised their disdain for white supremacy and played the accommodationist roles that had allowed them to survive the white tyranny. Laurel resident Gladys Austin feared the white and black volunteers who knocked on her door. Although Austin had joined the NAACP, she kept her membership a secret because she was a teacher at Oak Park High School and could lose her job for belonging to the organization. The local NAACP president, Benjamin Murph, took great strides to protect the identity of members who wanted to remain anonymous. He even sneaked to their backdoors at night to collect NAACP dues so no one would tie them to the Movement. Conversely, COFO volunteers approached blacks more directly and in the light of day,

²⁴ Quoting David Owen to [?], July 9, 1964; David Owen, to Mom, Pop, and Rat Fink, July 2, 1964, Owen Papers. Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections;” Shaw Collection; Joseph Ellin, to the Editor of the [*Kalamazoo Gazette*], August 1, 1964, Ellin Collection.

which frightened Austin and her neighbors. She recalled, “They were black and white folks together and we were scared. . . we were kind of . . . standoffish. . . we were kind of afraid to [talk to them]. Well, you didn’t know what was gonna happen because you weren’t used to it. We only wanted to talk to the white people that we knew and that we trusted. And everybody else, we were scared of them.” Austin, like many blacks, was “scared all the time.” Others decided to confront that fear and determined that they would rather die for the cause than “die doing nothing.”²⁵ All locals understood that the volunteers had only to survive the summer. The locals had to survive the repercussions of fighting white supremacy long after the volunteers departed.

As the summer progressed and the volunteers grew closer to the black community, they often adjusted their perspectives. After a few weeks, David Owen was assigned to work in Laurel. Because volunteers in Laurel had less access to vehicles, Owen spent the majority of his free time with locals rather than with other volunteers. During the evenings, he played cards with the adults; on afternoon breaks, he tossed a football with black children; and on Sundays, he attended black church services. In these activities, he began to perceive the black struggle from the black perspective; and the black community, including the children, began treating him as their equal. Once volunteers cultivated these new relationships, they realized that most local blacks understood that their disfranchisement rendered them politically alienated and powerless. Ellin eventually realized that blacks, regardless of their education or literacy, possessed extensive knowledge about the political system. They coveted the vote because they believed suffrage would provide them with the power to demand improvements in their

²⁵ Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009, MOHP recording.

neighborhoods, such as forcing the city to pave their streets and to bring an end to the daily oppressions they faced.²⁶

Heartened by their new understanding, volunteers sought to inspire each other and the locals by infusing the tedious canvassing work with symbols of inspiration. Since Palmers Crossing lacked street signs, the canvassers created their own. They named the center road “Freedom Street” and the street that intersected it, “Now Street.” They used names of black celebrities and black activists to identify various roads; and they named three small roads that converged in one corner of Palmers Crossing, “Schwerner,” “Chaney,” and “Goodman Streets” after the freedom fighters who had vanished in Neshoba County. When they met people who had tried to register to vote, they recruited them to become block captains. While canvassing, they also informed residents about the Freedom Schools and community centers and successfully persuaded many of them to join these activities. As the summer progressed, blacks steadily flocked to the Movement.²⁷ Many of these mobilized locals sent their children to the Freedom Schools.

SNCC field secretary, 23-year-old Charlie Cobb, designed Freedom Schools as a means of decolonizing the minds of the black youth and fostering an indigenous Movement throughout Mississippi. He intended the Freedom Schools to deprogram Jim Crow children and transform them into Freedom Children by encouraging free and critical thinking. Since the Redemption era, the state had tried to colonize black minds by rigidly controlling the information available to black students. It assigned textbooks and curriculums that omitted mention of black achievement, exalted the “Southern Way of

²⁶ Joseph Ellin, to Editor of the Gazette, July 10, 1964, Ellin Collection.

²⁷ Quoting Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; David Owen, to Mom, Pop, and Rat Fink, July 2, 1964, Owen Papers.

life,” and socialized blacks to accept subjugation. Some districts even prohibited mention of Reconstruction. Mississippi invested on average four times the sum to educate white students as it expended on black students, and the Hattiesburg school district expended twice as much.²⁸

Freedom Schools became the inverse of Mississippi’s black public schools and served as the soul of the Movement, particularly in Hattiesburg where they became immensely popular. The curriculum demythologized white supremacist concepts and moved students toward self-realization by teaching them about their African heritage and the history of black resistance to oppression. The architects of the Freedom Schools hoped the curriculum would inculcate in the students a desire to unshackle themselves from the yoke of intellectual darkness and physical oppression. The teachers built on that desire to politicize and mobilize students into an indigenous liberating force. The Freedom Schools became one of the more effective Freedom Summer programs in the Central Piney Woods. Freedom School Director Staughton Lynd, a white professor from Spellman College, considered Hattiesburg “the Mecca of the Freedom School World.” The organizers expected 700 children to participate in the entire state and around 75 to 150 students to register in the Hub City. On the first day of registration in Hattiesburg, however, 600 students arrived. The range of ages—from eight to 82—surprised the teachers. Teachers held classes from 8:00 a.m. until noon, and from 7:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m., in the basements and attics of churches. When the intense heat often rendered

²⁸ Quoting McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 83. John R. Rachal, “We’ll Never Turn Back: Adult Education and the Struggle for Citizenship in Mississippi’s Freedom Summer,” *American Education Research Journal*, 35 (Summer 1998): 176; George W. Chilcoat and Jerry A. Ligon, ““Helping To Make Democracy A Living Reality: The Curriculum Conference of The Mississippi Freedom Schools,” *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 15 (Fall 1999): 46-48.

schooling difficult, teachers taught outside under the shade of trees.²⁹

In the first few Freedom School sessions, students and teachers, both a little in awe of each other, crossed racial boundaries constructed centuries before their existence. Children of Jim Crow, like Cheryl Outlaw and Glenda Funchess, had learned in their early childhoods to distrust, if not fear, and dislike, whites. They had grown up in “two Mississippis,” and in those spaces where black and white lives intersected, Jim Crow laws and customs enforced black deference. When Outlaw first stared up at volunteers Lawrence Spears and David Owen, who entered her church, she was not sure how to respond to them because “we had never been . . . that close to white people. Period.” At first, she and the other kids were “afraid to touch them.” Owen and Spears dispelled such fears when they heartily hugged Willie Moore, Outlaw’s grandmother. Outlaw was stunned that these white men embraced the black community because she had grown up believing that “whites didn’t like blacks.” Mt. Zion Freedom Summer student Glenda Funchess experienced a similar epiphany with her teachers, Dick Kelly and Paula Pace, when she noticed that they genuinely considered blacks their “equal[s].” Kelly, Pace, Owen, and Spears dined, worked, socialized, worshipped, and slept in the black community and cultivated friendships with black locals. Through these actions, which expressed the volunteers’ faith in the equality and dignity of humans regardless of race,

²⁹ Quoting Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White*, 105; *Ibid.*, 13, 106-107. “Freedom Schools’ Springing up Throughout Mississippi,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 1964; Part II: Introduction, Citizenship Curriculum, Ser. 15, Reel 39, “Mississippi Summer Freedom School Program,” Ser. 15, Reel 38, both in SNCC Papers. Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” September 14, 1998, 3-4, Adickes Papers, USM. Joseph Ellin to the Editor of the *Gazette*, July 10, 1964; Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964, both in Ellin Collection.

the volunteers gained the trust of students like Outlaw and Funchess.³⁰

That summer, in the basements and attics of churches, freedom teachers led their pupils on a journey of discovery of African American history. Few students knew much about black history as it was either absent or distorted in American textbooks. The Mississippi state school curriculum taught that blacks were inferior persons content in slavery and Jim Crow because they were incapable of intellectual greatness. Freedom school teachers exposed these white supremacist teachings as myths designed to sustain black oppression. They enthralled their students as they unveiled a black heritage rich in history and culture. Teachers spoke of the kingdoms and empires in Africa as bastions of enlightenment and economic power. They taught of slave revolts and of black protest throughout the Jim Crow era. They informed students about black intellectuals, leaders, and businessmen, who, with very little opportunity, had achieved great success. COFO staff also stacked Freedom Libraries and community centers with books written by or about Africans and African Americans for students to read.³¹

The community centers attracted local blacks of all ages with its libraries, but also with classes in sewing, arts and crafts, public health information, and literacy. The community center in Palmers Crossing was built inside an old two-room schoolhouse and became the hub of the Movement in the town. Blacks, particularly youths, flocked to the

³⁰ First and last quotes, Glenda Funchess, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 23, 2008, MOHP recording; all other quotes, Cheryl Outlaw, interview.

³¹ Sandra Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 68; Part II: Introduction, Citizenship Curriculum, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Glenda Funchess, interview; Larry McGill interview; Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview. Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964; Joseph Ellin to Mom and Dad, July 9, 1964; Joseph Ellin to the Editor of the Gazette, July 10, 1964, all in Ellin Collection.

center where books and volunteers opened their minds to once barred worlds of knowledge. One Sunday, volunteers Phyllis Cunningham and Jinny Glass stopped by the center to pick up some materials and found a group of children surrounding the place. The children cheered when they noticed them, and the volunteers hated to tell the children they did not open on Sundays. The children came in droves the other six days of the week.³²

The teachers and community center staff hoped to instill in their students an understanding of their oppression and to provide them with the skills and tools to rise against it. They employed a didactic pedagogy rather than the lecture approach, which would simply reinforce submissiveness. Constant questioning and debating led to greater participation, free thinking, and active listening, and inculcated in students a sense of a collective purpose and empowerment—all necessary qualities to facilitate intellectual enlightenment, self-realization, and transformation. Teachers also used socio-drama methodologies to empower their students in the learning process. Joseph Ellin led his students at Priest Creek Baptist Church in Palmers Crossing to create a congressional committee to investigate how the American political system could bring changes to Mississippi. In Sandra Adickes' class, students reenacted a betrayal of a slave revolt as a cathartic exercise to express their outrage at the servile adults in their community who refused to challenge their oppressors. Adickes also led her students in discussions that

³² Community Center Report; Sandy Leigh to Bob Moses, Re: Report from Hattiesburg, July 8-14, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 38, both in SNCC Papers, Glass Diary, August 11, 18, 1964; "Flintridge Woman in South as Civil Rights Worker," *La Canada Valley Sun*, October 8, 1964, Owen Papers.

related their hardships to the struggles of prominent black writers, including Richard Wright and James Baldwin, so they could discover how to overcome them.³³

Most of the students were shocked by revelations of African kingdoms, renowned black scholars and novelists, and revolts against oppressors to the point that one boy cried out to his teacher that surely she was lying because he had never heard of such things before. When she tried to explain that blacks had in fact achieved such greatness, the boy “burst into tears,” and his teacher cried with him. They cried for all the knowledge denied him for the sole purpose of demeaning and oppressing his race. The students also rejoiced that summer, for the freedom schools and community centers gave them access to knowledge that allowed them to fight their oppression. Jimella Stokes ached for more knowledge, and she attended Adickes’ every class. James Jr., Harold, and Anthony Harris could hardly contain their excitement over all they learned in school, effusively elucidating every new lesson to their activist mother, Daisy. For Daisy Harris, the most important lesson her children learned was “that we’re not at the bottom, we’re level with other people,” and consequently, they had the ability to achieve great things. Laurel freedom students Larry McGill and Johnny Magee had never seen so many books before; neither had they ever learned anything about their heritage and oppression. They became voracious readers. McGill had some understanding of how whites oppressed blacks by denying them access to information. Still, by acquiring knowledge barred to him by the

³³ Chilcoat and Ligon, “Helping To Make Democracy A Living reality,” 64-68, Nancy and Joe Ellin, to S and D, July 8, 1964, Ellin Collection; Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” 4-5; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 58-59; Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview.

state curriculum, he learned the context of black suffering and became well-versed in the methodologies and lexicon of resistance to articulate and empower his protest.³⁴

Often the students found the lessons in racism painful. At St. John Freedom School in Palmers Crossing, children were shocked when their white teachers, Stan Zoborsky and Doug Baer, asked them how they would feel if someone called them a “nigger.” Carol Jackson and her sister Lillie, like most of their peers, had always been “taught, you don’t say the ‘n’ word, period . . . you were really proud of who you were.” At first, “no one wanted to talk about it,” but over time as the children began to trust the white men, they began to discuss how racism affected them. The more they examined the impact of racial hatred and racist language, the more the children realized why their teachers had first asked them the question, because they “really started understanding the significance of the ‘n’ word.”³⁵

As students achieved an understanding of their oppression, teachers guided them to explore the world of their oppressors. Teachers explained that white elites created white supremacist myths in the interest of exploiting black labor for greater white profit. These myths also helped them sustain control over politics by disfranchising blacks and focusing the attentions of poor whites on racial hatred rather than on class oppression at the hands of the elites. By keeping the poor divided by race, white elites preempted a biracial class revolt. Politicians and other white elites determined who had access to jobs,

³⁴ First quote, Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 68; *Ibid.*, 58-59; second quote Daisy Harris, interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008. Part II: Introduction, Citizenship Curriculum, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Glenda Funchess, interview; Larry McGill interview; Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” 4-5; Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009, MOHP recordings.

³⁵ Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor interview.

loans, good schools, decent housing and living conditions, and who had access to equal justice. Mississippi passed laws to sustain the power of wealthy whites and through the white supremacist curriculum, whites bolstered the absolutist state. In such a state, only one political party could survive; if more than one existed, debate ensued and caused the monolithic support of the system to crumble. Teachers also educated pupils about the Movement and its struggle to change the black condition by incorporating blacks as free and equal citizens. They reiterated that throughout human history, elites had feared the education of the masses because knowledge often led to revolt against power.³⁶

The volunteers had come to Mississippi to help inspire that revolt. Through the didactic pedagogy, role-playing, communal writing exercises, and reading assignments they taught students to think critically, speak freely, and to participate in the rebellion against the absolutist state. Teachers at True Light Baptist Church Freedom School staged a mock precinct and mock county election to teach students how the political process functioned. During one of Nancy Ellin's night classes for adults, the class discussed the indictments against King George III in the Declaration of Independence, and several students pointed out the parallels to their grievances against the white supremacist system in Mississippi. Freedom students also developed newspapers like the "Freedom News," which provided them with a powerful medium to dissent against the system. Several students authored articles praising the Freedom School teachers for introducing them to black history and criticized the black-only Mississippi public schools where they learned white lies and were socialized to accept their inferior status. In her writings, teenager Carolyn Moncure implored students to persuade adults to see

³⁶ Part II: Introduction, Citizenship Curriculum, and Introduction, "Freedom Booklet," both in, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers.

themselves as political beings with the ability to inspire others to join the Movement and to affect change. She appreciated the activism of the volunteers, but her town needed local adults to join the Movement en masse and to assume leadership positions. Only then could the Central Piney Woods and Mississippi at large actually change.³⁷

Teachers also helped students transform from pupil to activist by bringing them out of the classroom and into the Movement battlegrounds. Canvassing became one of the most important activities for the Freedom School students because it politicized the students and because they recruited many adults to the struggle. They faced setbacks as some blacks so feared even speaking to canvassers that they shouted at the students “get out of here, y’all gonna get killed.” Stokes became enraged with these “Toms,” as she called them, and blamed them, in part, for the persistence of Jim Crow. The “Toms” also angered student Rita May, who refused to accept any excuse for failing to make the trip to the registrar’s office. Many of the freedom students expressed a fierce defiance of Jim Crow that shocked and worried some of their parents. Stokes was arrested three times for her participation in civil rights activities, but jail failed to quell her determination. Her mother worried every time she attended mass meetings: “what if they bomb the church?” she would often ask, and Stokes would reply, “Mama, I have to do this . . . I can’t let y’all stop my freedom.” Stokes told her teacher Sandra Adickes, “I plan to change the state of Mississippi. I’m always fighting for my parents’ freedom so I won’t be worried about my

³⁷ Nancy Ellin to [?], August 1964; Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964; Nancy Ellin to [?], July 9, 1964, all in Ellin Collection. Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” 5; *Freedom News*, 1 (July 23, 1964), Adickes Papers; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 74; Larry McGill, interview.

children's freedom."³⁸

Black youths demonstrated a devout commitment to the Movement in the Central Piney Woods. They flooded into Freedom Schools, the COFO offices, and onto the streets to canvass residents. McGill and many other students were inspired to join the struggle by their parents, who were already involved in the Movement. Daisy Harris's sons attended Mt. Zion Freedom School, and she took them to demonstrations and mass meetings. Others like Johnny Magee, whose mother was a maid dependent on whites for her livelihood, ordered him to stay away from the Movement. Although Magee had always been an obedient child, he was so drawn to the Freedom Schools and the protests that he defied her wishes. These students acquired leadership skills, such as public speaking, public relations, community development, political organization, as well as the clerical and legal skills necessary to develop, collect, and compile records, affidavits, and reports to sustain the black revolt once the volunteers left.³⁹

The nightly mass meetings reflected the spirit of the Movement. They bound together staff, volunteers, and locals in a collective force against the absolutist state. The strength of their forged bond often emerged most powerfully during the freedom songs echoing from the packed churches. For each song, drawn from the gospel music so deeply ingrained in black church life, was filled with meaning that bound black and white in a single purpose—to know the earthly freedom that God endowed upon every human

³⁸ Last quote, Adickes, "The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools," 16; all other quotes, Jimella Stokes, interview. Adickes Journal, July 14, 1964, Adickes Papers; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 65.

³⁹ Glenda Funchess, interview; Johnny McGee, interview, Larry McGill, interview; Daisy Harris, interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008; "Mississippi Freedom Summer School Program," Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers.

being. So they sang, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around” and “We shall not be moved like a tree by the water,” and “Oh Freedom,” and “This Little Light of Mine.” Then, activists and locals stood up to share their experiences, announce the latest protest, and give inspiring speeches. Eleven-year-old Lillie Jackson savored those meetings. She was filled with pride at the sight of “a church full, just flowing all outside . . . all the black people . . . talking about what we want.” The meeting closed with everyone crossing arms and grasping the hands of their neighbors to sing together, black and white, “We Shall Overcome.” After the singing, Daisy Harris recalled, “the fear was just gone.” With the arrival of Freedom Summer and the volunteers, many locals believed that white America might finally be moved to empathize with their plight.⁴⁰

As local black activists grew more confident about the efficacy of the Movement, they grew more defiant against white supremacy in their daily lives. Laurel activist Maycie Gore worked that summer as a nanny for a white family, the Rayburns. At first, Tom Rayburn, the pastor of the Second Avenue Baptist Church and a staunch segregationist, had no idea that Gore was heavily involved in the Movement and that she and her husband Alvin, who worked at Masonite, had hosted a white and a black volunteer in their home. After the media and the FBI flooded into Mississippi in the wake of the disappearance of the three activists in Neshoba, Rayburn interrogated Gore about her view of the Neshoba case and Freedom Summer. She tried to avoid his questions. One morning, Rayburn speculated that the civil rights workers had not disappeared but were off somewhere “goofing off.” Infuriated, Gore responded, “I don’t believe they’re

⁴⁰ First quote, Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Preyor interview; second quote, Daisy Harris, interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008; Glenda Funchess, interview.

goofing off. I believe something happened to them.” A few days later, Gore was elected secretary of the Laurel MFDP, and the newspaper reported her election. When she arrived at work the following morning, Rayburn informed her that “you’re going to have to curtail some of your activities if you’re going to work for us.” Gore picked up her purse, departed the Rayburn home, and never returned. Soon afterward, whites learned that the Gores had hosted two volunteers, and they called the house threatening to harm them. Alvin Gore called on his Masonic brothers for help. Once it became known that black Masons were protecting the Gore home, the harassment ceased.⁴¹

Whites also directly harassed and mistreated the volunteers. When Adickes tried to open a local bank account, an employee interrogated her about her education, her job in Mississippi, and her residence. After one of the tellers looked at her address, she snarled, “507 Mobile Street, Nigger quarters!” Shaw overheard a woman downtown remark to her friend that she planned to purchase a gun and kill any volunteer who approached her. Community Center volunteers received frequent threatening calls from racist whites. Jewish volunteers, who had hoped to draw the local practitioners of their faith into the Movement, soon learned the dangers inherent in such efforts. At the onset of the summer, Klansmen dispersed leaflets across the Central Piney Woods, which warned white gentiles: “Every dollar you spend at a Jewish business . . . is helping toward the elimination of our white Anglo-Saxon race . . . do you think the ‘Freedom’ workers who are invading our state are here out of a heart of love? Make no mistake! There is only one thing that brought them here . . . the dollar. The JEWISH dollar. . . the main tool of the Communist Party is the NAACP. This diabolical combination of smart

⁴¹ Maycie Gore, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording.

Jews and stupid Negroes are using racial agitation as a smokescreen for any and all purposes that help the Communist Party.” Local Jews, as volunteer Irene Paull noted, suffered the life “of uneasy stranger[s]” in a land belonging to them and yet not. Efforts to mobilize them failed.⁴²

Activists who sought white gentile support confronted similar obstacles. In May, the National Council of Churches sponsored the Hattiesburg Minister’s Project and appointed as its co-coordinators a white Presbyterian minister, Robert Beech, and a local black minister, Reverend John Cameron. Beech focused his efforts on recruiting white moderates—a mostly silent minority in Hattiesburg—to join the struggle. He persuaded a local doctor to host interracial seminars in his home and to work toward creating an interracial committee to address racial issues. Beech also found many sympathetic whites among the faculty at the University of Southern Mississippi, but most of them remained unwilling to state their views publicly for fear of reprisals. Although some professors invited integrated groups into their homes, they only opened their doors “under the cover of darkness.” Racist whites responded to Beech’s efforts with anger and violence. Parishioners at the Westminster Church forced the senior pastor to expel Beech from their church. A Klansman, W. M. Hamilton, who owned a local hardware store, not only refused to sell Beech a ladder but punched him in the face. Beech testified about the assault in court, but Judge Mildred Norris dismissed the charges. Afterward, authorities arrested Beech on charges of false pretenses for overdrawing on his checking account by

⁴² First quote, Adickes Journal, July 15, 1964, Adickes Papers; rest of quotes Irene Paull, “Jewish Civil Rights Workers Hold Service in Negro Church,” n. d., Rabbi David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain, USM. Joseph Ellin to Mom and Dad, June 28, 1964; Joseph Ellin to Mom and Dad, July 18, 1964, both in Ellin Collection. Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; Glass Diary, August 8, 1964.

\$70.⁴³

Klan violence proved the most powerful force suppressing Operation Freedom Summer, and it escalated quickly. Around midnight, on June 28, two white men in a red pickup truck rode into black Hattiesburg; the passenger, wielding a rifle, shot into a crowd of blacks, but failed to hit anyone. He shifted his rifle toward two vehicles bearing out-of-state license tags and shot into their hoods. Terry Shaw recalled that “the long hot summer was on.” After the shooting, Shaw came into contact with the FBI for the first time. Prior to the summer only two FBI agents covered the Central Piney Woods. The Bureau increased the number to eight by the end of June. Although agents took a detailed report of the attack, which included a clear description of the truck, no arrests followed. Days later, a black 14-year-old, James Smith, rushed into the COFO office and shouted that white men had abducted a black man. Shaw contacted the FBI. The following morning a Hattiesburg police lieutenant summoned Shaw to his office where he informed her that they had found the “missing man,” and he stated that the alleged abductors were “just niggers” playing a joke. Shaw learned otherwise. Several people besides Smith witnessed the abduction, but only Smith agreed to sign an official statement. Policemen took Smith to the station where they demanded that he accuse COFO of fabricating the incident. When Smith refused to pedal their lies, officers threatened to take his mother off

⁴³ Quoting Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections” Shaw Collection; Drew Pearson, “Mississippi’s Reward for Kindness,” *The Washington Post*, December 25, 1964; Robert Beech to Drew Pearson, January 4, 1965, both in Ben-Ami Papers. For Hamilton’s Klan activities, see “Swift Justice,” *Delta Ministry Reports*, newsletter, March 1967, Delta Ministry Vertical File, USM; Loren C. Brooks, to SAC, February 1, 1966, DABURN FBI File, #44-1512-528, Helfrich Papers; Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964, Ellin Collection; WATS Report, July 8, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 50-51.

the welfare rolls. The FBI created a permissive atmosphere for the violence and threats when agents neglected to investigate the abduction just as they had failed to investigate the eight slayings of blacks across the state earlier that year. The case passed into oblivion like so many others.⁴⁴

Racial hostility intensified after July 2 when President Johnson signed into federal law the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed voting and employment discrimination, prohibited segregation in public facilities, and forbade public school segregation. The Mississippi patriarchs, beginning with Governor Johnson, vehemently opposed the bill. The governor implored white citizens to disobey the act until he could test its constitutionality in court. Editors of the *Hattiesburg American* condemned the bill, and reporter Elliott Chaze encouraged whites to express their loathing for the law by refusing to celebrate Independence Day. The Klan expressed its disapproval with terror. Just after midnight on July 3, a truck entered a black neighborhood in Jones County and hovered near the Greasy Spoon restaurant. Within minutes, the Greasy Spoon exploded into flames. Dynamite triggered by an electric clock blew out all of the brick restaurant's windows, destroyed the juke box, and damaged the ceiling and the roof. Officer Wayne Valentine who investigated the scene expressed surprise. He knew the owner Curtis Crosby as "a fairly reliable" person who "stays in his place," and officers never considered the teenage hangout a "trouble spot." Although many blacks in the area

⁴⁴ First quote, Hospitality Month in Mississippi," n. d., Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; all other quotes, Shaw, "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection. "Holes Shot in Parked Cars," *Hattiesburg American*, June 29, 1964. The writer has not been able to find any more information about the mysterious disappearance of the unidentified black man. For the FBI's failure to investigate the eight other slayings in 1964, see McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 103.

observed the explosion and watched the police arriving at the scene of the crime, no one came out of their homes. Fear kept them inside.⁴⁵

Most whites in Hattiesburg and across the state protested the Civil Rights Act as Chaze had suggested by refusing to celebrate Independence Day. On the Fourth of July, as volunteers from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) headed from Memphis toward the Central Piney Woods, they learned their first lessons of white Mississippi's dichotomous perceptions of race and liberty. The volunteers never saw a single American flag on display during their journey from the northernmost part of the state to the Piney Woods. When the UFT volunteers arrived in Hattiesburg, they dropped their bags at COFO Headquarters on Mobile Street, where locals including Vernon Dahmer—whom many volunteers thought was a white man—served them lunch. The volunteers were shocked. They had heard most local whites would treat them, at best, with great disdain. Doug Smith, the local youth coordinator, told them that though Dahmer might look white, his partial black heritage rendered him black in Mississippi. Dahmer embraced his blackness with pride and became one of the greatest activists in the Movement, not to mention “the wealthiest ‘black’ man in Hattiesburg.” African American volunteer William Jones accepted the explanation immediately. As a black man reared in Alabama,

⁴⁵ Quoting Wayne Valentine to Inspector E. F. Ray, July 3, 1964, Ser. II, Subser.10, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]; Civil Rights Act 1964, July 2, 1964, Document Number: PL 88-352, 88th Congress, H.R. 7152, “A Summary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” *Civil Rights Digest* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, August 1964). “Analysis of the Civil Rights Law,” *Freedom Booklet*, Ser. 15, Reel 39; WATS Report, Ser. 7, Reel 15, both in, SNCC Papers. “CR Measure Being Put to Test Across Nation,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964; James Saggus, “Governor Advises Citizens Not to Comply with Law Until Tested,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964; “Wrong Johnson,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 2, 1964; Elliott Chaze, “Be a Misfit,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964.

Jones had known mixed race people like Dahmer his entire life. It took more time for the white volunteers to comprehend the complexities of racial identity in the South.⁴⁶

In the afternoon, volunteers, staff, and locals congregated on Dahmer's farm for a Fourth of July picnic, where the volunteers again experienced sights and events inconsistent with their perception of Mississippi and the Movement. Dahmer owned a lovely ranch style brick home nestled on a hill of his large farm where he lived with his wife, Ellie, and three of his eight children. Dahmer took the volunteers on a tour of his large cotton fields, while they all sang Freedom Songs. Unlike local whites, blacks celebrated the Fourth of July with "explosive joy," singing, and chatting, and feasting on "catfish deep-fried in large dome-bottom iron pots." The celebration was briefly disrupted when a muddy truck with a rifle rack on the back drove slowly by the farm. Dahmer and one of his sons retrieved rifles from their home and headed toward the fence where they knelt in firing positions. The truck passed again, but faster this time. When the truck faded into the distance, the Dahmers returned to the picnic. Startled by the sight of guns, one of the COFO directors informed Dahmer that the activists adhered to nonviolence; Dahmer replied in an unyielding but courteous manner that he would use the methods necessary to protect his family from "those rednecks who had been terrorizing him for a long time."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Quoting Umoja Kwanguvu [formerly William D. Jones], "Picnic at Vernon Dahmer's," April 1999, Umoja Kwanguvu Freedom Summer Collection, USM, [hereinafter cited as Kwanguvu Collection]. Adickes Journal, July 10, 1964, Adickes Papers; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 52-54, 57.

⁴⁷ First and second quotes, Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 54; third quote, Kwanguvu "Picnic at Vernon Dahmer's." Adickes, "The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools," 3.

The nuances of the Movement and of Hattiesburg racial relations began to take shape for the volunteers that day. Blacks commemorated the Fourth of July, a holiday celebrating liberation—which they lacked—while their white counterparts, who enjoyed great liberty, refused to observe the holiday. Dahmer, a racially mixed man, who appeared white but whose miniscule black heritage rendered him a full member of the oppressed race, owned property and a nice brick home. Yet he lacked the power that usually accompanied economic advantage as he remained disfranchised and under the perpetual threat of violent attacks by whites. He responded to such threats with self-defense, a seeming contradiction of the Movement’s nonviolent strategy. Volunteers would soon learn, however, that most black Mississippians fiercely believed in self-defense and used nonviolence as a tactic, rather than a way of life.⁴⁸

Over the course of the summer, volunteers also shed some of their naïveté, as they realized that the Freedom Summer Project could not, in one summer, produce a utopian community void of the racism, elitism, sexism, and regional prejudices so prevalent in America. At the onset of the summer, the socioeconomic, racial, and regional divides caused some volunteers to perceive themselves as saviors, and they arrived in Mississippi with a “missionary” zeal reminiscent of the “paternalistic” racism they strove to destroy. Some volunteers used racist language and harbored racist ideas, often without realizing it until confronted. Although Ginny Glass adored her host family and the children who visited the community center, she referred to a black child as “this darling little pick

⁴⁸ Umoja Kwanguvu, “Picnic at Vernon Dahmer’s,” Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” September 14, 1998, 3; Elliott Chaze, “Be a Misfit,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964. For the use of self-defense by locals and the debate over nonviolence, see Dittmer, *Local People*, 180-181; Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 204-206; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 122-123.

ninny,” and made jokes about her parent’s fears of interracial relationships. Over the course of the summer, interaction with blacks forced volunteers like Glass to confront their own racism. Glass was amazed by the determination and intelligence of local blacks and horrified by the racist system that suppressed their opportunities.⁴⁹

Certainly, one summer could not produce a biracial utopia. Still, as these largely middle-class whites moved into a life of poverty and danger, many of them confronted their prejudices and restructured their perceptions. They realized that they could learn as much from locals as the locals could learn from them. Freedom School student Cheryl Outlaw recalled that the volunteers “taught us how to be strong because they were strong” when they confronted the white police state, but the black community taught them how to endure hardships because blacks “were survivors.” The volunteers generally came from privileged homes where they bought what they needed, but locals fed their families from food sources they harvested. The locals had long endured and survived humiliation, inequity, and violent white attacks by drawing strength from their close-knit communities that fostered psychic protection from white onslaughts and encouraged collective uplift. The volunteers grew attached to these strong cohesive communities, and they, too, learned to endure.⁵⁰

Volunteers also grew inspired by local blacks who used the tools of the

⁴⁹ First and second quotes, McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 103; *Ibid.*, 101-115; third quote, Glass Diary, August 25, 1964; *Ibid.*, August 18, 1964; August 12, 1964; Shelia Michaels, “Freedom is A Constant Struggle: Overcoming Reticence, Denial, Pain & Shame,” St. Louis, Missouri Conference, October 20, 2001, Michaels Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 242-246; 263-265, Carson, *In Struggle*, 111-121.

⁵⁰ First and second quotes, McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 92, 103-104: all other quotes, Cheryl Outlaw, interview. Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, interview; Jimella Stokes, interview; Adickes, *Legacy of a Freedom School*, 60-62.

Movement to launch direct-action protests not planned or approved by COFO. Because the Freedom Summer gave the Movement the national visibility it needed as the white volunteers captured nationwide media attention, the stage was set for a massive black assault on Jim Crow. Blacks across the Central Piney Woods commandeered that stage to shine the spotlight on white tyranny and demand their liberation. After the Fourth of July, local blacks led the charge in testing the Civil Rights Act in the Central Piney Woods, which began the shift of leadership from the organizers toward the locals. Although SNCC and COFO officially opposed accommodation testing, most of the staff and volunteers joined locals when they initiated sit-in demonstrations. As Joseph Ellin argued, if COFO activists and volunteers tried to prevent indigenous protests, they would deflate the passion of the Movement and diminish local participation.⁵¹

Moreover, local blacks often initiated sit-ins without the accompaniment of volunteers or organizers. In early July, two locals, Peggy Jean Connor and her pregnant sister-in-law, spontaneously sat down at Owl Drug Store's white-only lunch counter. White customers and the staff bolted from their seats and stations. A local white shoe salesman approached the women and shouted, "don't you know you're not wanted here." Connor found his rage rather humorous and ironic, since he had on many occasions knelt at her feet to sell her shoes but disdained the notion of eating next to her at a lunch counter. When the store owner informed Connor that he refused to serve "Negroes," she quietly left. But she refused to accept defeat. Instead, she sued him for violating a

⁵¹ Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964, Ellin Collection; Joseph Schwartz to Leon and Shirley, n. d., Schwartz Papers.

congressional act, and eventually she won.⁵²

Black teenagers, many of them members of local NAACP youth chapters, led the majority of the sit-in protests that summer. They became some of the most powerful infantry soldiers in the local struggle, particularly when they led a series of sit-in campaigns. In mid-July, six black youths from the NAACP Youth Council and COFO including 18-year-old Garvin Hughes, 12-year-old Larry McGill, and 14-year-old Jessie Arrington tried to integrate the lunch counter at the Kress department store in Laurel. They informed local police and FBI agents of their plans. Still, they suffered an attack at the hands of Klansmen who were waiting for them. During the melee, in which Arrington was stabbed and the other teenagers were beaten with bats, Chief L. C. Nix was on the premises, but neglected to respond. After the attack, other police and the sheriff arrived at the scene, and Nix arrested one of the perpetrators but released him on a \$25 bond. Moreover, he also arrested an African American Arthur Harmon, for saying “G--- d---” and charged him the same \$25 bond. In the late afternoon, when a local African American, Jerry Jenkins, tried again to integrate the lunch counter, a group of whites attacked him while police watched. When the defendant in the Arrington and McGill beating failed to appear at his trial, he lost his bond, and the case was dropped. Despite the violence, sit-ins continued. Thirteen NAACP youth members integrated the Greyhound Bus Station and Woolworth’s lunch counter without incident.⁵³

⁵² First quote, Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection; second quote, Peggy J. Connor, “A Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi,” n. d., Peggy Jean Connor Collection, McCain, USM. In Shaw’s original transcript, she referred to Connor as Mrs. Norris to protect Connor.

Around the same time, McGill organized another sit-in at Kress. Moments after he and his comrades sat at the counter, an old woman approached McGill, nudged a gun into his side, and warned him, “nigger, you don’t get out of here I’ll blow your brains out.” He looked up into her wrinkled face and saw “hatred” in her “gray eyes . . . like a dog gone mad.” McGill understood that she had been “rooted to hate” blacks. She was not unusual as white radicalism was fairly common in Laurel. McGill saw too in her eyes that she would actually murder him if he refused to leave. He rose from his chair and walked outside. After the police arrested the woman and set a court date, whites made harassing phone calls to the McGill household and broke the windows in their home. Several Laurel Freedom Summer students wrote letters to Mayor Scott to complain about the attacks and harassment. One student implored the mayor to personally investigate these violent attacks. Police officers responded by threatening to arrest her, as they claimed the letter constituted a threat.⁵⁴

Court authorities, however, reluctantly tried the woman who threatened Larry McGill. To prep McGill for the trial, civil rights lawyers staged mock cross-examinations in which they drilled McGill with questions. Still, nothing could prepare him for the terror that overwhelmed him when he entered the courtroom packed with mostly hostile whites. As he approached the stand, he saw the old woman at the defense table and behind her “all these white people . . . looking at me, green eyes, blue eyes, hazel eyes all looking at me.” He had never been in the company of so many whites. The defense

⁵³ Quoting Civil Rights Commission, *A Report on Equal Protection in the South*, 46F; *Ibid.*, 46. WATS Report, July 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Larry McGill, interview.

⁵⁴ Quoting Larry McGill, interview. WATS Report, July 17, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

attorney, a white-bearded man who appeared just like the “Ole Miss mascot” to McGill, walked past the witness stand, then whirled around and walked straight toward him, stopped and snarled, “did anybody put a gun on you boy?” It seemed to McGill like “fire just shot from his eyes” as though “he were wicked.” McGill “froze, I couldn’t say nothing. I just started crying.” The COFO workers had to rescue him from the witness stand. Soon after, the judge ordered the accused and the lawyers to approach the bench and spoke with them in hushed tones. And then as McGill recalled, “they let her go. Case dismissed.”⁵⁵

Jim Crow justice sustained many brazen attacks that summer. Around the same time as the Kress sit-in, a group of black teenagers decided to integrate the Burger Chef without seeking backing from any of the established Movement organizations. The Burger Chef was located on Cook Avenue, the main artery running through the heart of the KC Bottom, the poorest black section of Laurel. The proprietors allowed blacks to purchase food at the back window but prohibited them from dining inside. Many African Americans considered the existence of a segregated establishment in their neighborhood a grave insult that they would no longer tolerate. When a group of well-dressed black protesters entered Burger Chef, a group of whites threatened to attack them. Some 20 other blacks gathered in the area and threatened to throw bottles at the white mob unless whites allowed the black teenagers their right to enter the restaurant. The whites shouted, “Go home Yankees,” and hordes of them assaulted the black protestors. Whites wielding knives slashed black teenager Terry Gillum across the face with a razor blade and lacerated his brother, Willie Roy, on the chest. Police ignored several calls by blacks

⁵⁵ Quoting Larry McGill, interview. WATS Report, July 13, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

about the confrontations because the callers, out of fear, refused to leave their names.

Some of the white patrons watched the attacks in bewilderment. A white teenager, Frank McKenzie, watched in horror as several adult white males wielding a hose stuffed with lead beat a black teenager who was desperately trying to escape.⁵⁶

Angered and devastated by the white assault, particularly the stabbing of Gillum, black teenagers flocked back to the Burger Chef. When they arrived, police on the scene ordered them to leave. One of the teenagers, Jerome Wyatt, saw rage in the eyes of the white patrons, and he and his friends obeyed law enforcement orders. Other blacks reacted with violent fury. A 30-year-old black man, Charles Coleman, stabbed a white man, Harrell Stringer; and 30-year old African-American Charles Jordan wielded a shotgun and threatened to shoot whites. Police quickly arrested Coleman and Jordan. Police never arrested white perpetrators who attacked black teenagers. The *Laurel Leader-Call* neglected to even mention white violence against blacks at the burger joint. Enraged by the biased and rough treatment, groups of blacks retaliated by throwing rocks at whites who drove through the KC Bottom. When a 20-year-old black man, James Lee Buckley, hurled rocks and bottles at vehicles occupied by white passengers and injured a woman and her baby, authorities charged him with assault and battery with attempt to maim.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Quoting WATS Report, July 5, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Judge Frank McKenzie, Jr., interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 31, 2006, 742, *An Oral History Of Jones County*, vol. 792, MOHP; Larry McGill, interview.

⁵⁷ Jerome Wyatt, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 21, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 973, MOHP; "Racial Violence Flares in Laurel: Arrests Follow Drive-In Clash," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 6, 1964; "Two Injured by Bottle: Negro Held," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 7, 1964; Larry McGill, interview.

Surprisingly, the courts did not subject blacks to the usual inordinate severity of Jim Crow justice. Likely, the white patriarchs feared that if they subjected black defendants to stern punishment while failing to even arrest whites who broke the law during the protests, they would invite federal investigations. To begin with, prosecutors never indicted Jordon for wielding the shotgun. In September, a grand jury indicted Charles Coleman and James Lee Buckley for assault and battery with intent. In early October, Buckley pled guilty and the court sentenced him to one year in jail. Judge Lunford Casey suspended 10 months of the sentence and released him after he served his time and placed him on two years of probation. Although jurors found Coleman guilty of the stabbing, they requested that the court grant him mercy in sentencing. Judge Casey imposed a one year sentence which he immediately suspended. He placed him on three years probation and fined him \$750. The *Laurel Leader-Call* referred to the sentencing of Coleman as “light” but neglected to mention that police refused to arrest a single white person who engaged in violence during the racial fracas or that authorities had never punished the men or woman who had threatened and harmed Larry McGill and his fellow activists during the Kress sit-ins.⁵⁸

Hattiesburg teenagers who led sit-ins also faced white brutality and injustice. Twice on July 6, around 20 black teenagers tried to integrate peacefully the By-Pass Inn located in Hattiesburg. During the second attempt, a white woman aimed a pistol at the group and ordered them to leave. They complied in a peaceful manner, but police arrested

⁵⁸ Quoting “Light Sentences in Race Flare,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 15, 1964. “28 indictments,” *The Laurel Leader-Call*, September 25, 1964; *State of Mississippi v. Charles Coleman* (1964) case no. 2636, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 21, 473, 532-533, *State of Mississippi v. James Lee Buckley* (1964), case no. 2622, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 21, 496-497, both at, Laurel Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi.

10 of them later that night on false charges of hurling bricks and overturning a vehicle. At the police station, officers threw nine of the teenagers in the drunk tank and forced one of them into a separate room, ordered him to sit on the desk, and then turned out the lights. In the dark, they asked him who led the sit-in at the restaurant. When he replied that he did not know, one officer punched him in the stomach and called him a liar and a “nigger,” while other officers chastised him for acting like a “bad nigger” on the streets but a frightened coward in their custody. When he responded that he “wasn’t afraid,” four officers took turns punching him. After the beating, they ordered him to “get his black ass out” of the station. With COFO’s urging, the Department of Justice filed a police brutality complaint with the FBI, but agents never took any action on the case.⁵⁹

Police harassment and brutality proved a constant form of oppression in the Central Piney Woods. After locals staged several sit-ins, police officers began harassing local black businesses and arresting several owners on false charges. They also commonly arrested and beat kids who participated in sit-in protests. Some of them simply enjoyed harassing blacks—whether or not they were involved in the Movement. Blacks in Palmer’s Crossing knew Constable Wilmer Kitchens as the most notorious and brutal racist in the area. He denounced miscegenation publicly even though everyone knew he visited his black girlfriends under the cover of night. Kitchens and his fellow constable, Cotton Humphrey, had a reputation for “shaking down” black club owners and beating blacks for sport. One night in June, Kitchens made the mistake of assaulting Cloudies Shinall. The young black man had no ties to the Movement, but the oppression of his race enraged him. When Shinall and his girlfriend stepped out of Bama Madison’s pub,

⁵⁹ Quoting affidavits, in Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection. WATS Report, July 6, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

Kitchens, for no apparent reason, ordered two lawmen to throw Shinall into his vehicle. The men complied by hurling Shinall face first toward Kitchen's car. When Shinall struggled to his hands and knees, Kitchens and the men beat him. Shinall's girlfriend started screaming for Madison to help, but she was helpless against the lawmen. Shinall refused to be a victim. He fought back. In the struggle he knocked off Kitchen's eyeglasses. In the moment of shock that followed, Shinall wrestled free and fled toward the woods. Infuriated, Kitchens and his men pursued him. Soon after, Madison heard shotgun blasts echoing in the woods.⁶⁰

As Shinall ran from certain death, his mother, Lee Mae Shinall, sat up with her daughters canning vegetables and waiting for her son to come home. She had just decided to retire when two white men banged on her door. They demanded to see Cloudies. He's not home, she told them, but they raided her house and searched for him. "You sure he hasn't been here[?]" one of the men asked. Her eyes fell across the blood splatters on their clothing. She insisted that she had not seen her son that night. One of the men headed out her front door and jumped off the porch. She could hear him talking to someone, and she rushed outside to find Constable Kitchens searching for Cloudies outside the house. "Oh, it's you Mr. Kitchens . . . what happened. . . is Cloudies into something?" Kitchens refused to answer other than to say, "He just acted Damn negro" and continued searching around the house. Finding no one, he turned to the others, and said, "Well the son of a bitch ain't here" and informed Lee Mae Shinall that "if

⁶⁰ Quoting Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009. Shaw, "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection; Nancy and Joe Ellin to S and D, July 8, 1964, Ellin Collection; *State of Mississippi v. Cloudies Shinall* (1965), case no. 6434, transcript, in Mississippi Supreme Court appeal record (December 1965), case no. 43,866, 800-801, [hereafter cited as *Mississippi v. Shinall* (1965), transcript].

[Cloudies] don't come you'll find him somewhere because I put a hole in his head you can put an axe in." As the men left, Shinall's sister started crying, "Mother they have done something to him."⁶¹

Soon after Kitchens and his men departed, Shinall came home in the arms of his friends; his face was disfigured with contusions from the beating. His right eye was so swollen it seemed to protrude from his socket; his lips were puffy and bleeding; and his head was split in the middle gushing blood. Kitchens had nearly killed him. Shinall would never forget the beating he suffered, and someday he would get even. Blacks in Palmer's Crossing also whispered of the other reason Shinall vowed to take down Kitchens. White men, including lawmen, commonly bought local blacks alcohol and in return demanded they bring them a black woman for the night. Kitchens purportedly considered rape of black women a benefit of his office. A black woman would later accuse him as one of the many white men who gang-raped her. Blacks in Palmer's Crossing also contended that Kitchens had repeatedly raped Shinall's girlfriend. They knew that the rape enraged Shinall and that he dreamed of vengeance.⁶²

Strangely, Kitchens believed, like many southern whites, that blacks adored him. He even remarked to a black woman once, "You know I'm your friend. Why, if you niggers had to vote, I'd be sheriff." On one occasion, he stopped a vehicle occupied by

⁶¹ *Mississippi v. Shinall* (1965), transcript, 810-814.

⁶² For the purported rape of Shinall's lover, see Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 148-149 and Jeanette Smith, interview. For further rumors about Kitchens reputation for raping black women and for the persistent rape of black women by white constables and other white men, see *Cloudies Shinall v. State of Mississippi*, Appellant's Brief, Filed January 17, 1966, case no. 43, 866, Supreme Court Record, 9, MDAH; Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview. Many blacks accused Constable Wilmer Kitchens and Cotton Humphreys of abusing blacks, see, *Mississippi v. Shinall* (1965), transcript, 787-814.

five white male volunteers and a black female volunteer, Lorne Cress. At first, Kitchens failed to notice Cress because she sat quietly in the backseat. He ordered the driver, Morty Malvain, to pull out his driver's license, and then shouted, "if you say anything I'm going to kill you." He proceeded to the passenger side where he called Stan Zibulsky a "beak-nosed motherfucker" and then slapped him. When he noticed Cress, he spiraled out of control. He launched into a tirade about all the sexual perversions he imagined the white men engaged in with her. "What are you letting them do?" he asked, "suck your pussy? Get out of that car." Cress froze. After a horrid moment of silence, Kitchens morphed himself into her protector. "I don't want to see you again in this car with them," he cautioned. "If you need anything, you just come to me." He eventually released them, but he followed them to Victoria Gray's home before driving away. COFO staff complained about Kitchens' behavior to Sheriff Bud Gray who promised to resolve the issue. Despite the complaints, Kitchens continued to harass activists and subjected them to repulsive diatribes. "[I hope] your mother . . . is being raped by niggers right now," became his favorite line.⁶³

One evening, Constables Kitchens and Cotton Humphrey approached Freedom Summer teacher Sandra Adickes, who was walking with several activists, including a black man, near St. John's Church. Speaking to Adickes and pointing at the black man, Kitchens asked, "Is that nigger your husband? . . . Are you fucking them niggers?" She responded, "No Negro has ever spoken to me the way you have just spoken to me." He retorted, "Well, you shouldn't be living with niggers. Those nigger gals will tear your

⁶³ First and last quotes, Shaw, "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection; all other quotes, Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 74. Lorne Cress, affidavit, n. d., *Mississippi Black Paper* (New York: Random House, 1965).

hair out.” Adickes countered, “I’ve always conducted myself as a lady and everyone else around me has always conducted himself or herself as a gentleman or lady. That is until now. You have a foul mouth and you shouldn’t talk to people that way.” She rejoined her group. Jinny Glass called Constable Kitchens the “MEAN” constable, because of his reputation for harassing activists and blacks.⁶⁴

As the summer progressed, volunteers noticed that Hattiesburg police had become increasingly cruel. Kitchens and Humphreys were only two of many lawmen who harassed activists. Police routinely barged into Victoria Gray’s home to search through her work papers. To hamper desegregation efforts on the city busses, police relied on malicious arrests. On one occasion, a white woman had moved her packages and asked a black woman passenger to sit down. Infuriated by the violation of segregation laws, the bus driver called the police, who ordered the black woman off the bus, grabbed her purse, planted a knife inside, and then arrested her. Joseph Ellin wondered about how much desegregation the “fringe element” would accept, and he worried that the volunteers might soon cross some invisible boundary that would unleash massive white violence.⁶⁵

Unbeknownst to Ellin, the line had been crossed the moment volunteers entered the Central Piney Woods, for the Klan had been watching activists and planning attacks. On July 10, Klansmen followed white volunteers, David Owen, Lawrence Spears, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, and two black women, Marjorie Hyatt, and Janet Crosby, as they

⁶⁴ Last quote, Glass Diary, August 14, 1964; all other quotes, Adickes Journal, August 19, 1964, Adickes Papers.

⁶⁵ Quoting Joseph Ellin, to Mom and Dad, July 9, 1964, Ellin Collection. Joseph Ellin to Mom and Dad, July 3, 1964, Ellin Collection; Glass Diary, August 17, 1964 and August 18, 1964. David Owen to Mom, Pop, and Slim, June 18, 1964, David Owen to Mom, Pop, and Rat Fink, July 2, 1964, David Owen to [?], July 9, 1964, all in Owen Papers.

strolled along the railroad tracks toward the Morning Star Baptist Church. After awhile, the volunteers noticed the two white men in a cream colored pickup truck with no license plates. The driver suddenly pulled his truck in front of the group, parked, and shouted “[We’re] going to get [you].” The young volunteers wanted to run, but they knew the older rabbi could never outrun the Klansmen. So they stood their ground, even as the Klansmen descended from the truck wielding iron pipes. The Klansmen left the black women alone. The taller, younger Klansmen rushed Spears and repeatedly slammed his pipe against Spears’ shoulders, face, and head. Trying to protect himself, Spears crouched toward the ground and rolled down an embankment. When the Klansman came after him, Spears curled into the protective position. While the Klansman kicked and punched him repeatedly, he called him a “nigger lover,” “white nigger,” “Commie,” and “Jew.” Then he grabbed Spears’ scattered papers and tried to shove them into his mouth as he shouted into his face, “eat this shit nigger lover.” Finally, he stopped and said, “get up and run nigger.”⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the older and shorter but more solidly built Klansman attacked Owen and Lelyveld, all the while castigating them as “white niggers” and “Commie[s].” He slammed the pipe across the back of Owen’s head before Owen could protect himself. Lelyveld, lacking in-depth training in nonviolent protection, suffered the most. The Klansman repeatedly swung the pipe across the rabbi’s face, bashed the pipe into his

⁶⁶ First, second, and third quotes, “Letter From the South,” August 22, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; all other quotes, Lawrence Spears Statement to the FBI, July 10, 1964, July 16, 1964, FBI Report 44-25913-18, Lawrence Spears Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Spears Collection]. WATS Reports, July 10, 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; “3 COFO Workers Beaten,” July 21, 1964, *The Voice of the Movement: The Freedom Voice of the Fifth Congressional District*, vol. 1, Ellin Collection; “Police Chief Warns Against Violence,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 11, 1964.

chest, knocked him down on his knees, and finally struck him hard across his head. The lesson had been taught. The rabbi lay prostrate on the ground, as blood poured from multiple lacerations across his head and body and contusions formed on his chest, arms, and face. Having completed their mission, the Klansmen returned to their truck and drove away. When Spears reached his friends, he helped the rabbi to his feet. Owen stood several feet away, the back of his blond hair stained red with blood. The beaten men continued their journey to Morning Star Baptist Church. The Klansmen, however, decided that they had not finished their fun and tried to run them down. The younger man jumped out of the vehicle, and shouted, "I am going to whip him again," as he headed toward Lelyveld. Spears stepped in front of Lelyveld, "haven't you hurt him enough?" The man answered by swinging his iron pipe toward Lelyveld, but Spears raised his left arm shielding the blow, which hit him just above his elbow. The man returned to the truck, and the driver sped away. Throughout the attack, several white people watched from their porches nearby. No one called the police.⁶⁷

When the beaten men arrived at the church, the shocked locals and COFO workers rushed to provide whatever aid they could. The children stared at their bloodied teachers and the bludgeoned rabbi in shock. They had heard stories of white brutality, but many were too young to have witnessed it yet. Ten-year-old Cheryl Outlaw had long ago learned to fear those poor whites who lived just across the railroad tracks from her family in the East Jerusalem community. Outlaw's grandmother often told her that the rich whites sent the poor whites to "do all the devilment." The beating of her beloved teachers

⁶⁷ First and second quotes, "Letter From the South," August 22, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; all other quotes, Lawrence Spears Statement, Spears Collection. Shaw, "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection; "3 COFO Workers Beaten," *The Voice of the Movement*; WATS Report, July 10, 1964, SNCC Papers.

and the gentle rabbi seemed to prove her grandmother's theory true. After that day and the other horrors of Freedom Summer, she grew increasingly afraid of whites. The children watched as the adults tended to the three beaten men as best they could before they transported them to receive medical treatment at Methodist Hospital.⁶⁸

It seemed at first that justice might prevail in the case. Police Chief Hugh Herring condemned the attacks as "unprovoked" and declared that he would not tolerate "lawlessness." He promised that if police found the men, he would charge them with "assault and battery with intent to kill." Yet the chief neglected to support his pledge with action. Police could have easily tracked down the perpetrators, for the victims had provided officers with detailed physical descriptions of their attackers and the truck, but officers were more interested in intimidating COFO workers than jailing the Klansmen. To white Hattiesburg's dismay, the FBI involved itself in the case. Lelyveld was one of the most prominent rabbis in the nation, and even though local Jews failed to protest the beating of a rabbi in their town, the FBI received intense pressure from outside Mississippi to respond. After his release from the hospital, Lelyveld departed Hattiesburg under FBI protection and moved to an undisclosed location. J. Edgar Hoover ensured an immediate and thorough investigation.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Quoting Cheryl Outlaw, interview. "Letter From the South," August 22, 1964, Ser. 15, Reel 39, SNCC Papers; Lawrence Spears Statement, Spears Collection; "Freedom Summer Recollections," Shaw Collection; "3 COFO Workers Beaten," *The Voice of the Movement*; WATS Report, July 10, 1964, SNCC Papers.

⁶⁹ Quoting "Police Chief Warns Against Violence," *Hattiesburg American*, July 11, 1964. WATS Report, July 11, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Rabbi Morris B. Margolies, "The Dilemma of the Jew in the South," *The Jewish Monitor*, July 1964, 57, Ben-Ami Papers; David Owen to [?], n. d., Owen Papers; "Mississippi Police at Fault Rabbi Says," *The New York Times*, July 14, 1964, NYT Article Archive; Director [J.

Still local authorities hampered justice. By July 23, local law enforcement officers charged 48-year-old Clifton Archer Keys and his 31-year-old nephew Kilmer Estus Keys with “assault and battery with intent to maim,” rather than attempted murder as Herring had pledged. Although the FBI sent reports on the case to the Department of Justice and the White House, the attorney general hoped that the District Attorney Jimmy Finch would successfully prosecute the men “in good faith” as promised, so he neglected to intervene. To the dismay of the COFO workers, Finch turned the August 3 grand jury hearing into an interrogation of the Movement. When Owen, Spears, Lelyveld and the two black women, Hyatt and Crosby, entered the witness waiting room and sat together against a wall, the bailiff segregated the room by forcibly removing the black women. Mistreatment of the group continued in the courtroom. Finch tried to insinuate that Lelyveld had precipitated the attack by embracing the black girls before the men assaulted them, but Lelyveld insisted that no such embrace occurred. Later, Finch interrogated Spears about his host family. When Spears asked if he could consult a lawyer before releasing their names, Finch shouted, “No! Boy, you realize that you may be liable for contempt of the proceedings?” African-American volunteer Margaret Hyatt further infuriated Finch when she requested that he address her as Miss Hyatt rather than “Marge.” Finch shouted, “I don’t give a God Damn what your name is.” Ultimately, Finch charged both Klansmen with simple assault, which was a misdemeanor charge. The

defendants pled no contest. The court fined them \$500 and sentenced them to 90 days hard labor but then suspended the sentence.⁷⁰

The attack and the failure of the local courts to punish the Klansmen terrified the locals and the volunteers. In a letter to his parents, Owen expressed shock over his ordeal. “I’m just now getting used to the idea that they really meant to hit us as hard as they could with those pipes, that they didn’t really think that we were human, and they weren’t bothered a bit by the thought of how we might feel.” Owen and Spear’s student, Cheryl Outlaw, could never quite erase the image of her beaten teachers from her mind or escape the fear that angry white men would attempt to harm her. Indeed, they would try. On a summer evening soon after the attacks, while she and her sister walked toward the movie house, a truck full of whites carrying sticks raced toward them shouting, “niggers.” Outlaw and her sister fled the street so quickly, she literally ran out of her shoes. She and her sister escaped attack, but their fear intensified.⁷¹

Whites unaffiliated with the Klan also assaulted volunteers. On July 20, in downtown Hattiesburg, a 48-year-old white man, Hutson Hartfield, sneaked up behind Peter Werner, a white Freedom School teacher, and knocked him to the ground. Rather than fighting back, Werner curled into a knot, even as Hartfield kicked him in the face. Werner’s fellow freedom teacher, Susan Patterson, shouted for help while Bill Jones, a

⁷⁰ First quote, A. Rose to Mr. Belmont, July 21, 1964, FBI File #44-259-19; second quote, A. Rosen to Mr. Belmont, July 31, 1964, FBI File # 44-25913-42, both in Helfrich Papers; all other quotes, “Letter From the South,” SNCC Papers. Civil Rights Commission, *A Report on Equal Protection in the South*, 53; Mississippi Summer Project - running summary of incidents, Matthew Zwierling Collection, USM, [hereinafter cited as Zwierling Collection]; David Owen to Mom, Pop, and Slim, August 3, 1964, Owen Papers.

⁷¹ First quote, David Owen to [?], n. d., Owens Papers, USM; second quote, Cheryl Outlaw, interview.

black volunteer, rushed into the Walgreens to call the police, but customers and employees refused to help him locate a telephone. When officers finally arrived, they allowed the beating to continue before finally arresting Hartfield. At the police station, officers also charged Werner with assault and battery after Hartfield claimed that Werner had attacked him earlier in the day. When Jones insisted that Hartfield was lying, an officer shouted, “Boy, don’t you call that man a liar.” During the afternoon trial, several white men crowded into the courtroom to sneer at the activists. Highly intoxicated, Hartfield took the stand and ranted about “jigs” and “niggers” and “nigger lovers” and accused various people in the courtroom of attacking him, including Werner. His defense lawyer was equally theatrical, as he interrogated the Freedom teachers about their political beliefs. When Jones testified, he referred to Werner and Patterson as his “comrades,” then spun around, pointed at Jones, and in a dramatic fashion, inquired loudly, “are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” Two days later, Judge Montague found Hartfield guilty, but he lamented that he despised delivering the verdict. He fined Hartfield \$40, but reduced it to \$20 citing Hartfield’s “good behavior.”⁷²

Injustice in the face of white brutality persisted throughout the state even as the FBI increased its presence in Mississippi. By July Hoover had dispatched over 100 agents to Mississippi. Over the course of the summer, the FBI radically altered its modus operandi toward the Klan from passive intelligence gathering to aggressive investigation.

⁷² Quoting “Teacher Beaten, Charged, Case Dismissed,” *The Voice of the Movement: The Freedom Voice of the Fifth Congressional District*, vol. 1, Issue, 10, July 21, 1964, Ellin Collection. WATS Report, July 21, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Umoja Kwanguvu “Violent Incident in Downtown Hattiesburg: Freedom Summer 1964,” April 1999, Kwanguvu Collection; Terri Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection.

Agents swarmed into the state, infiltrating the towns, cities, and backwoods to recruit informants, interrogate suspects, and spread fear among Klansmen. The FBI worked closely with State Police Commissioner T. B. Birdsong and Governor Johnson. Initially, the FBI remained generally unconcerned about Klan violence outside the Neshoba case. During the search for the missing civil rights workers, search teams found three black bodies in the Mississippi River. One of the men was clothed in a CORE T-shirt, but as soon as agents realized he was not Chaney, they made no efforts to identify him. Agents identified the other corpses as Charlie Eddie Moore and Henry Hezekiah Dee. Only a handful of agents and local police worked on the case. The Neshoba case remained the only prominent federal case in Mississippi that summer, which left local law enforcement and court officials free to ignore scores of other violent racial crimes.⁷³

Most state officials were as responsible as local officials for the pervasiveness of Klan violence. In 1964, although Governor Johnson opposed the Klan, he failed to fully mobilize against the hooded order, and the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission focused more on suppressing civil rights activism than Klan violence. Johnson worked with the Highway Patrol and the FBI to sustain surveillance on the Klan. He provided the FBI with a list of all the known Mississippi Klansmen, complete with the names of the state officers and significant officers in various counties, but he did not order the commission or any other agency to wield all of its resources against the White Knights. On July 2, Commission Director Erle Johnston informed Allen Dulles that the commission considered the White Knights and the Americans for the Preservation of the

⁷³ Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 86-94; "Killed by the Klan;" Correspondence, T. B. Birdsong and J. Edgar Hoover, July 13 and 17, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; Dittmer, *Local People*, 249-250; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 98-101.

White Race (APWR) innocuous “as long as the groups and their members observed Governor Johnson’s policies of law and order.” The commission’s slim file on the White Knights mainly consists of a few newspaper articles, a small collection of Klan literature, and a handful of reports. Although Johnston alerted the governor to rumors that the White Knights and the AWPR planned to stockpile weapons and engage in lawlessness, no further reports exist on the matter.⁷⁴ The commission likely perceived the Klan as a necessary evil, and Johnson lacked the courage to decimate the hooded order.

State leaders, like the conservative patriarchs of the Central Piney Woods, still held out hope that nonviolent massive resistance would succeed and overshadow the Klan. On July 28, while addressing the delegates at the Mississippi Democratic Convention, Johnson summoned southerners to wage legal and political battles against the intruders and agitators. In the face of mounting sit-in campaigns, the delegates passed resolutions that condemned the Civil Rights Act of 1964, lauded Governor Johnson’s efforts to challenge the act’s constitutionality, and devoted themselves to the continued segregation of the races. The Association of Citizens Councils of Mississippi fell in line with Governor Johnson and called on citizens to use lawful methods to resist the implementation of the act. On July 21, the Forrest County Citizens Council condemned the Civil Rights Act as the most oppressive legislation since Reconstruction. It also castigated white customers for remaining at the counters next to blacks and demanded that store owners resist the act by using Mississippi laws such as trespassing and disorderly conduct to force police to remove black patrons. Finally, the Citizens Council

⁷⁴ White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, List of State Officers and some County Officers and members, n. d.; Erle Johnston, MSSC Special Report, May 1, 1964, both in Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers. Erle Johnston, Jr., MSSC Report, July 2, 1964 SCR #6-37-03-1-1-1, MDAH.

called on white citizens to counter the sit-ins with a white selective buying campaign, to boycott stores and restaurants that complied with the federal law.⁷⁵

Mississippi judges also supported Johnson's strategy by dismissing civil rights cases. During the Freedom Days campaign in the spring of 1964, Hattiesburg civil rights activists had filed a lawsuit to challenge the Mississippi bill that denied demonstrators their constitutional right to picket in front of the entrances to public buildings. In late July, Justices Harold Cox, Sidney Mize, and Richard T. Rives dismissed the lawsuit, ruling that there was "no evidence or testimony to show it was the intent . . . of the legislature . . . to suppress, deter or in any manner impinge upon . . . any constitutional right of the plaintiffs to free speech, assembly and the right to petition for redress of grievances by demonstrating peacefully and orderly." Judge Mize also stymied civil rights struggle in his response to a COFO lawsuit. COFO had accused the Klan, the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, the Citizens Council, all local, county, and state law officers in Mississippi of preventing blacks from exercising their constitutional rights. COFO had accused some of these defendants of using terrorism and charged that state and local leaders had passed unconstitutional legislation designed to impede black political participation. Judge Mize dismissed the case.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr., Address to State Democratic Convention, July 28, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 4; Resolutions Passed at the 1964 State Convention of the Democratic Party of the State of Mississippi, Ser. II, Subser. 9, both in PBJ Papers; "Official Council Statements on the 'Civil Rights Act,'" *The Citizen*, July-August, 1964, vol. 8-9, The Citizens Council Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Mitchell, MSU]; "Citizens Council Urges Civil Rights Act Resistance," *Hattiesburg American*, July 21, 1964.

⁷⁶ Quoting "3-Judge Court Dismisses Hattiesburg Negroes' Suit," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 17, 1964; "Local Negroes Lose Picketing Suit," *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1964; "Civil Rights Cases Remanded to County," *Hattiesburg American*, July 27,

The Klan continued to flourish in the permissive atmosphere. In the early morning hours of July 24, white supremacists heaved a Molotov cocktail onto the front porch of Richard and Earline Boyd's home; the couple had been active in Hattiesburg civil rights since the fifties. The fire burned the porch and the front door. Soon afterward, someone fired shots into a restaurant owned by Mamie Lee Phillips, a voter registration worker. In late July, the Klan sent death threats to the Jones County NAACP president Benjamin Murph and several other activists warning them to cease their civil rights activities if they did not "want the three things that happened to the guys in Neshoba" to happen to them. Klansman maintained surveillance on the Kress and Woolworth stores on Friday nights and Saturdays to "knock Negroes off the stools if they are sitting on them." Many of the Klansmen used brass knuckles.⁷⁷

Throughout the summer, Klan violence received national attention and condemnation, particularly in early August when FBI agents found the bodies of the three freedom fighters in Neshoba County. Many locals, activists, and volunteers from the Central Piney Woods traveled to Meridian for James Chaney's funeral. Since no Hattiesburg temples opened their doors to the Movement, activists held a Jewish memorial service for the men at the Truelight Baptist Church. With tears in his eyes and a tremble in his voice, Rabbi Daniel Litt, who had replaced Lelyveld, led the service. Fifteen Jewish summer volunteers, a few white ministers from the National Council of

1964; "Judge Mizes Dismisses COFO 'Scattergun' Suit." *Hattiesburg American*, July 30, 1964.

⁷⁷ First quote, WATS Report, July 21, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; second quote, Samuel N. Craddock to SAC New Orleans, July 29, 1964, Henry DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-1, Helfrich Papers. WATS Report, July 25, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, September 29, 1992, MOHP Digital.

Churches, and a couple of local blacks attended. One of the volunteers, Irene Paull, later recalled “it was the strangest Jewish service, perhaps the saddest. . . I have ever seen.” Rabbi Litt asked a black child to fill a jelly glass with water, and he announced to the attendees that during the Kaddish—the prayer for the dead—they would use water since they lacked wine. In awe, a black child watched the eulogy from the doorway, trying to make sense of the Hebrew words. At the end of the service, Paull read from the prophet Isaiah: “Woe unto them . . . who change darkness into light And light into darkness . . . Let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like a mighty steam! Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the fetters of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke and to let the oppressed go free?” As the service ended, the mourners dispersed quietly into the rainy night as the Rabbi waved to them with fear in his eyes.⁷⁸ In the wake of the funerals, despair gripped activists. Yet the summer also infused Mississippi with hope.

By the close of summer, the Freedom Summer organizers had fulfilled their dual mission. First, they had achieved national visibility and incited a significant federal response, particularly because the tragic murders in the Neshoba case forced a massive FBI investigation. In September, Hoover ordered Special Agent in Charge of Mississippi, Roy K. Moore, to implement the FBI’s counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) “to expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various klans and hate organizations, their leadership and adherents.” Under these orders, the FBI transformed its mission from an investigation of a local klavern suspected in the murders to the destruction of the White Knights. In essence, the FBI declared war on the Klan. Second,

⁷⁸ Quoting Irene Paull, “Jewish Civil Rights Workers Hold Service in Negro Church,” Ben-Ami Papers. Umoja Kwanguvu, “Picnic at Vernon Dahmer’s;” Adickes Journal, August 7, 1964, Adickes Papers.

Freedom Summer organizers had achieved mass mobilization and politicalization of locals. The Freedom Schools proved one of the most vibrant and successful projects of the summer. Freedom teachers had provided students with the information and tools to challenge Jim Crow, and the experience politicized them. As the summer wound toward a close, black students expressed the knowledge that they had acquired in their final school projects. On August 7, students from the Priest Creek Schools debated the St. John School students on the issue of violence and nonviolence as strategies to achieve equality. The students from the St. John Methodist Church Freedom School authored a “Declaration of Independence,” in which they declared that Mississippi had violated the laws of the United States because it had deprived blacks of their rights to due process of the law; it had excluded them from the political process; it had prohibited them from exercising their freedoms of speech, assembly and petition; and the state had thwarted their efforts to obtain equal education, decent living conditions, employment opportunities, and impartial justice. They proclaimed that Mississippi blacks must liberate themselves from the bonds of oppression by decreeing themselves independent from the state.⁷⁹

The students also continued to take action despite efforts by the city fathers to quash their spirit. Jimella Stokes led five other students and their teacher Sandra Adickes in an effort to desegregate the all-white public library in Hattiesburg. Stokes chose the library instead of a restaurant because “it was the house of knowledge. . . . I wasn’t going to learn anything to go sit next to a white person in a restaurant.” When they arrived

⁷⁹ Quoting Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 93-94; Adickes Journal, August 7, 1964, Adickes Papers; “Declaration of Independence, Palmer’s Crossing, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, St. John Methodist Church,” *Freedom News*, 1 (July 23, 1964): 7, Adickes Papers.

around noon and asked for library cards, the clerks' "eyes nearly bolted from their sockets." When the librarian informed them that she could not give them library cards, Stokes shot back, "Who told you that, the Whites Citizens Council or the Ku Klux Klan . . . who told you that you couldn't serve us?" When the clerk failed to provide a response, Stokes declared, "If we can't use the library, then nobody else should."⁸⁰

When Stokes and her group sat down and read magazines, the library supervisor alerted the police. Within 20 minutes, Chief Hugh Herring arrived and ordered the library closed under orders from Mayor Pittman. Undeterred, the activists decided to stage a sit-in at the Kress lunch counter. Several police followed them. The waitress took the girls' order, but refused to serve Adickes, saying, "We have to serve the colored, but we're not serving whites who come in with them." When the group left in protest, a policeman arrested Adickes on vagrancy charges. On August 17, police officers arrested several more activists, including Bill Jones, Susan Patterson, Tom Edwards, and Ben Achtenberg, when they tried to integrate the library, but they did not arrest three black children who had accompanied them. Soon after, the city shut down the library indefinitely.⁸¹ It was at least a partial victory, for as Stokes demanded, if blacks could not use the library then neither should whites. Black activists also inadvertently won a similar

⁸⁰ First and third quotes, Jimella Stokes Jackson interview; second and fourth quotes, Adickes Journal, August 14, 1964, Adickes Papers; Incident August 14, 1964, Mississippi Summer Project - running summary of incidents, transcript, Zwering Collection.

⁸¹ Quoting Adickes Journal, August 14, 1964; Ibid., August 17, 1964; Adickes, letter to the Editor, '64 *Civil Rights Hostess Honored*, n. d., all in Adickes Papers; "Library Closed After Integration Attempt," *Hattiesburg American*, August 14, 1964; Incident August 14, 1964, Mississippi Summer Project - running summary of incidents, Zwering Collection; "Public Library is Closed Again," *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 1964, Kwanguvu Collection; "Public Library Will Reopen Here Wednesday," *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1964.

partial triumph in their MFDP challenge in Atlantic City.

The MFDP challenge served as the boldest national campaign of the Mississippi Movement. In the Central Piney Woods and across the state, the challenge massively politicized the locals, achieving a core goal of Freedom Summer. MFDP workers held parallel Democratic precinct, county, and state conventions at which delegates eventually selected 68 persons to attend the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, including six persons from Forrest County—Helen Anderson, Marie Blalock, J. W. Brown, and J. C. Fairley, as delegates and Pinkie Hall and George Harper, as alternates—and one delegate from Jones County, Robert Stinson. At the end of August, the delegates traveled to Atlantic City where they challenged the seating of the Regular Democrats on the grounds that the party had used voter discrimination and terror to exclude blacks from the political process. Despite powerful testimony by legendary figures in the Movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fannie Lou Hamer, the Credentials Committee, under pressure from President Johnson, who feared losing the southern vote, refused to unseat the Regulars. Instead, the committee offered the MFDP two at-large seats—a compromise the MFDP characterized as a betrayal. The Atlantic City challenge severed the tenuous trust that black activists had extended to white liberals. It proved a devastating end to the summer. Still, it proved a partial civil rights victory—white Mississippians certainly perceived it in such a manner. They considered the Democratic Party's recognition of the MFDP as the height of betrayal. Most of the white delegates left their seats vacant. Governor Johnson and most Mississippi whites ended Freedom

Summer with a defection to the Republican Party.⁸²

The Klan closed the summer with brutal attacks. On August 24, civil rights activist Brewell Curie hosted a farewell picnic for the volunteers at his farm in Jones County. Volunteers, activists, and freedom students including Larry McGill spent most of the day swimming in the pond and enjoying a picnic. In the evening, they gathered on the banks to sing folk songs. The festivities came to a halt, when two Klansmen—Pat Dickerson and Cecil Sessum—wielding chains and wooden clubs, approached the group. They asked the guitarist, volunteer David Gelfand, if he knew “Dixie.” When Gelfand tried to play the song, Sessum yanked the guitar out of his hand, heaved it into the pond, and started beating him. Mayhem exploded as some 13 Klansmen “charged out of the woods . . . like a cavalry” brandishing chains, clubs, and guns. As the Klansmen “charged down on [them] . . . shooting . . . hollering,” everyone ran toward the farmhouse. The Klansmen shouted, “Get them nigger-lovers.” They beat volunteers who lagged behind, particularly Gelfand. When several volunteers and workers plunged into the pond and swam toward the farmhouse, Klansmen trained their guns toward the swimming men and began shooting. As McGill and the fleeing locals reached the house, they threw themselves on the floor to avoid the bullets that splintered through the wood home and shattered windows. Curie’s son grabbed his gun, and shot toward the attacking white

⁸² Steve Max, *The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party: Background and Development*, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers. Freedom Democratic Party Delegates and Alternate Delegates, Ser. II, Subser. 9; Paul B. Johnson Jr., speech in response to National Democratic Convention, n. d., 1-3, Ser. II, Subser. 4, both in PBJ Papers; Freedom Registration Vote, September 1, 1964, Ser. 16, Reel 4, SNCC Papers; Joseph Schwartz to Bea and Izakkk, n. d., Schwartz Papers; 1964 Platform Mississippi Republican Party, Mississippi Republican Party Records, Ser. I, Mitchell, MSU; Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in American Since 1941* (New York: McGraw Hill Inc., 1991), 101-102; Carson, *In Struggle*, 125-126. Dittmer, *Local People*, 125-129, 288.

men. Finally, all the volunteers escaped inside the house except Gelfand. Klansman V. L. Lee pummeled him until repeated gunfire from the Curie home forced him and his brethren to flee.⁸³

Someone in the Curie household contacted federal and state law enforcement immediately, but the sheriff and his deputies arrived at the scene over an hour later even though the station was only a 15-minute drive from the farm, and the FBI did not appear until two hours after agents received the call. Activists identified one of the men who assaulted Gelfand. Later, Sheriff Deputy R. W. McMinn claimed that he had thoroughly investigated the incident, but COFO activists insisted otherwise. McMinn had not even bothered to search the scene of the crime. Gelfand, who suffered from contusions, an open wound on his knee, and a wrist sprain, was hospitalized over night.⁸⁴ The violent conclusion to the summer project proved an ominous introduction to the bloody battles to follow, but it also reflected the success of Freedom Summer as local blacks demanded that the FBI and local officials deliver justice in the case.

That summer in the Central Piney Woods, the meshing of black and white, indigenous and visitor, the *unfree* and the free, cultivated the local Movement into an

⁸³ Quoting Larry McGill interview. "COFO Reports Racial Incident," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 24, 1964; WATS Report, August 24, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; "COFO Reports Racial Incident," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 24, 1964. Sessum told his wife a slightly different story. He claimed Gelfand "smarted off" to him which precipitated the attack. He also showed her his pistol, a .38, that he used in the attack which matched evidence left at the scene. For Sessum's story, see FBI Report, January 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, # 44-1512-145, Helfrich Papers.

⁸⁴ WATS Report, August 24, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; August 22 incident, Mississippi Summer Project - running summary of incidents, Zwerling Collection; "Sheriff Probes: COFO Reports Racial Incident," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 24, 1964; "Brief of Contestants Urging the Vacating of the Contested Seats and the Holding of New Elections," Appendix, pp. 43a, Mississippi Election Contest, 1965-1966, Thomas Abernathy Papers, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, Oxford.

inexorable force with the strength to outlast the departure of the organizers and volunteers. The summer had certainly achieved Cobb's goal, for it had transformed the Jim Crow children in the Freedom Schools into freedom children. The volunteers had provided Freedom School students with access to knowledge denied them in their Jim Crow schools and the means and permission to articulate their ideas in their classes. As a result, these students became significant foot soldiers in voter canvassing and protests. Glenda Funchess perceived Freedom Summer as "a training ground to prepare us to go to the next level; and the next level was integrating schools." The adults would facilitate the integration, but the children would have to make it succeed. Funchess would be at the forefront of early school integration. That summer also set the path for Funchess' career: while observing civil rights lawyers fighting for black rights, she determined to become an attorney. Another Freedom Summer student, Carol Jackson, learned a lesson it took America decades to understand: "blacks and whites could live together." Jimella Stokes credited her freedom school teacher, Sandra Adickes, for drawing out the intellect she and the other students possessed, but had not been able to express fully. Adickes' students all became college graduates, a feat that Stokes in part, attributed to Adickes' inspiring teaching methods and her love for her students.⁸⁵

The victories of Freedom Summer also bestowed hope upon the adults who had to assume leadership roles to carry on the local struggle. On the last night of Freedom Summer, Jinny Glass' host, McCullim, informed Glass that the registrar's office had once again turned her away. Undeterred, Mrs. McCullim announced to Glass that she would return to the registrar the next day. McCullim still feared violent reprisals from whites:

⁸⁵ Quoting Glenda Funchess. Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; Adickes, "The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools."

she had grown up in a county haunted by lynchings and racial murders and well understood the consequences of black dissent. The summer protests, however, had emboldened her. Speaking to Glass, she said, “Now we’ve seen. Now, there’s no turning back.” Jimella Stokes noticed a change in the adults over the course of the summer as more and more agreed to go down to the courthouse to attempt to register and many joined the Movement, causing the circle of black activism to grow exponentially. Despite some continued resistance among fearful blacks, Stokes knew that “Palmer, Hattiesburg, Mobile Street would never be the same. . . . I knew that whatever happened, it would never go back.” Even activists like Daisy Harris, who had become involved in the Movement six months prior to the arrival of the volunteers, perceived Freedom Summer as a watershed. As she later recalled, “The summer opened the doors. Physically and mentally, it opened doors and let us know the time had come for change. . . . [We] walked through those doors” and assumed the reins of the Movement.⁸⁶

In late August, as the majority of volunteers prepared to leave Mississippi behind, most of them considered the Freedom Summer project successful. Joseph Ellin believed that activists had fulfilled SNCC’s purpose in Mississippi which was to “confront, organize, teach.” Activists had organized the political community, taught the people the structure of law and politics and how to change it, and opened the door for locals to confront the white supremacist system. Jinny Glass, who had grown much in her summer sojourn, returned home to her life of plenty with a new understanding of her divided America. She would not have long to change it, however, as six months later, just

⁸⁶ First quote, Glass Diary, August 25, 1964; *Ibid.*, August 18, 1964; second quote, Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; last quote, Daisy Harris, interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008. Adickes, “The Legacy of Hattiesburg Freedom Schools,” 8.

moments after she hitched a ride, a train slammed into her host vehicle, killing her. Still, Glass in her short life and the hundreds of volunteers who traveled to Mississippi that summer contributed to the transformation of the Magnolia State. As Terry Shaw departed, she noted that the volunteers left “with a great deal of faith in the strength and capabilities of Hattiesburg’s Negroes, but a pessimistic view of the obstacles they face. With a knowledge that we have accomplished something during ‘freedom summer,’ but a feeling that we should have accomplished a lot more. With a combined feeling of hate and love for that beautiful state of Mississippi with the twisted mind, and with a constant ache in our hearts for the fact that such a trivial thing as race has poisoned the spirit of every American citizen and left wounds that will not be healed for many years.”⁸⁷

At the close of the summer of 1964, the Mississippi project had not immediately altered the social or political structure of the Central Piney Woods or Mississippi, but Freedom Summer proved even more pivotal to the Movement than many believed at the time. Most immediately, the Klan attacks on white civil rights activists provided the Movement with the national outrage it needed to accelerate federal intervention. The FBI investigation in Neshoba had yet to produce any arrests or temper Klan violence, and the reality that America responded more aggressively to attacks on whites than blacks spread disillusionment among many activists. Still, it initiated the federal war against the Klan. Over the next six years, the federal invasion—as white Mississippians perceived it—would continue to spread across the state. The Civil Rights Act had yet to force integration, but it provided blacks with an opportunity to build desegregation cases and

⁸⁷ First quote, Joseph Ellin Journal, September 1, 1964, Ellin Collection; second quote, Shaw, “Freedom Summer Recollections,” Shaw Collection. “Forrest Lawn Funeral Today for Jinny Glass, 21,” *LaCanada Valley Sun*, February 1965, Glass Papers.

legally occupy the once “white only” spaces with sit-in protests. The federal government had taken a significant step toward assisting the civil rights activists, though the alliance was often strained because the government’s willingness to compromise with nonviolent segregationists rather than force their cooperation hampered progress. Finally, Freedom Summer established powerful local battalions in Jones and Forrest that dedicated themselves to altering forever the racial landscape. The local black assault on the entirety of Jim Crow proved the most enduring and significant development of Freedom Summer, for in the decade to follow as the ranks of COFO organizers and volunteers diminished and federal and media interests waned, black residents remained to fight segregationists on every battlefield, determined to win the war.⁸⁸ As the majority of volunteers departed the South, local blacks took over the reins of the Movement and launched a massive local black uprising against the white tyranny.

⁸⁸ For arguments regarding the Klan’s inadvertent role in aiding civil rights goals, see David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2003), 3, 47-59. For plans and evaluations of Freedom Summer, see COFO and SNCC, “Mississippi Summer Freedom Schools Program,” n. d.; Staughton Lynd, “Mississippi Freedom Schools: Retrospect and Prospect,” July 26, 1964; COFO, *Mississippi Handbook for Political Programs*, n. d., all in Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers. Carson, *In Struggle*, 112-114; Dittmer, *Local People*, 264-265; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 116-160.

CHAPTER VI:

DECOLONIZATION: LOCAL WAR OF ATTRITION

“Nigger, you’re going to get killed if you keep on what you’re doing,” the Klansman shouted through the phone. The calls came frequently to Vernon Dahmers’ home. Other warnings appeared too: a sign left on Dahmer’s farm depicting a Klansman as Uncle Sam declaring, “I want you in the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.” Late at night, white men drove slowly past the secluded farmhouse. The Dahmers had begun sleeping in shifts so at least one of them would be prepared to respond quickly if the White Knights attacked. Vernon’s wife, Ellie, always answered the door when someone visited, because she believed even a Klansman would not kill a woman. During the harvest, when working into the night, Dahmer carried a gun, and he always stopped his machinery and switched off the lights when a car approached. The Dahmers lived in a state of vigilance. They had reason to worry. Vernon Dahmer’s name was on the Klan hit list. In the fall of 1964, he was targeted only for harassment, but that soon changed.¹

Black men like Vernon Dahmer enraged Sam Bowers and his White Knights. He had led the Forrest County NAACP before the explosion of the local Movement, and he

¹ First quote, Ellie Dahmer interview, by Orley B. Caudill, 1974, Mississippi Oral History Project, Digital Collection, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews in the digital collection cited as MOHP Digital, recordings in this collection cited as MOHP recording, and printed transcripts in this collection cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]; second quote, Klan sign, Ira Grupper and Bob Beech Civil Rights Collection, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]. Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994; “Killed by the Klan;” prod. and dir. Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette.

had invited COFO and SNCC outsiders into Hattiesburg. They also feared Dahmer because if indigenous activists like him kept the struggle alive after the outsiders and the national media departed, the Movement would endure and likely succeed. So the Klan watched him. When the Freedom Summer project ended, Klansmen witnessed with relief the exodus of the majority of the so-called outside agitators and hoped that the local struggle would dissipate. To their chagrin, local blacks reassumed control of the Laurel and Hattiesburg Movements. Over the next 17 months, black locals fought a war of decolonization to unshackle themselves from the white tyranny that had ruled Mississippi since the fall of Reconstruction by launching a series of voter registration drives, direct-action campaigns, and legal battles. Dahmer remained involved, though often he stayed in the background by helping to fund activists or encouraging his friends and neighbors to vote. Toward the end of 1965, he reemerged as a significant leader in Hattiesburg. At that point, Bowers moved Dahmer to the top of the Klan's hit list. To destroy the Movement, he determined that he must eliminate local leaders.²

Long before SNCC and COFO arrived in the Central Piney Woods, local leaders like Vernon Dahmer, Clyde Kennard, B. F. Bourn, and Benjamin Murph had birthed the civil rights struggle, but SNCC and COFO had cultivated it into a full-blown Movement by broadening the base, mobilizing the masses, arousing media attention, developing

² For the Klan's discussions and plans for Vernon Dahmer, see, Federal Bureau of Investigation Report, November 1, 1967, Billy Roy Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-180; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9. # 44-1512-342, both in Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers]. For Dahmer's civil rights work, see, FBI Report January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8 #44-1512-189, Helfrich Papers; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1995, 99-115, 179-182; Hollis Watkins, interview by John Rachal, October 23, 1996, MOHP Digital.

revolutionary leaders, and launching a war against white supremacy. In the fall of 1964, the time had come for locals to retake the reins of the black freedom struggle and lead their fellow citizens against Leviathan. When black residents assumed leadership roles and recruited more locals to the struggle, they stabilized the Movement; and prospects for a long term victory strengthened. Localization never promised nor achieved swift victories, particularly because it inspired the police state to mobilize against the local struggle and the Klan to intensify its activities. To worsen matters, national attention on Mississippi waned after Freedom Summer, which allowed white patriarchs to sustain the myth of the Central Piney Woods as a racially moderate town and to stave off national pressure for federal action. During these trying times, the Movement faced internal struggles, lulls in activity, and a sluggish federal response. Still, because a core of local activists refused to retreat in the face of white attacks and always regrouped to launch a new series of protests, they ensured that the Movement survived. Whites fought a losing war because even when they emerged victorious in a battle, locals used the defeat to highlight continued white intransigence against federal law, which forced a gradual increase of federal intervention. Blacks understood they were fighting a war of attrition. As long as they stayed the course, victory was on the horizon.³

Localization first took flight in Hattiesburg in the fall of 1964. The COFO/SNCC

³ Charles M. Payne called SNCC's process of developing leaders "empowerment," see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 331; *Ibid.*, 330, 332-337. John Dittmer points out that though the SNCC infiltration of Mississippi was the "catalyst" that "empowered" locals, the local leaders before and after SNCC's arrival and departure allowed the Movement to begin and endure, see Dittmer, *Local People*, 424; *Ibid.*, 425-426. For the myth of moderation, see James K. Dukes, speech, "Pursuing a Late Justice: The Prosecution of Mississippi's Civil Rights Murders, Then and Now," August 29, 2000, videocassette, McCain, USM.

activists and the summer volunteers, who elected to remain in the Central Piney Woods that fall, all agreed that Freedom Days and Freedom Summer had achieved a significant goal—the “empowerment” of local people. Now, the time had come to turn over the full reins of power to locals. COFO promoted local resident Doug Smith from youth coordinator in the Hub City to Hattiesburg project director and to director of the Fifth Congressional COFO projects. Twenty-two volunteers and some COFO staff remained in the Central Piney Woods that fall, but their roles decreased over the next year as locals filled the ranks and took over leadership positions. Freedom Summer had served as a “rite of passage” for many Freedom School students, particularly the teenagers who assumed “adult role[s]” in the Movement when volunteers and staff departed. Jimella Stokes and Gwen Merritt served as full-time voter registration workers. Under the tutelage of Victoria Jackson and Helen Anderson, they also became “literacy teachers.” Throughout Forrest County, they taught adults how to read and interpret the Mississippi Constitution and then urged them to take the registration exam. Over the next year, local activists focused on the vote, leading them to become more involved with the grassroots Mississippi organization—the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP).⁴

During the transition, the Hattiesburg Movement briefly stagnated as internecine conflicts over strategy splintered the staff, volunteers, and activists. SNCC sent some of

⁴ First quote, Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 331, *Ibid.*, 332-334; all other quotes, Sandra Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 143, 146; *Ibid.*, 76. List of Volunteers Remaining in Hattiesburg; Hattiesburg COFO-Very Active, February 24, [1965], Ser. 15, Reel 38, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SNCC Papers]; Phyllis Cunningham “Paper-perceptions on Hattiesburg Movement,” n. d.; Lily M. Douglas report, vol. 126, Reel 25, both in Congress of Racial Equality Archives, Papers, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter as CORE Papers]; Daisy Harris, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

the white volunteers, including Richard Kelly and Joseph Schwartz, to canvass in white neighborhoods in hopes that they could unify poor whites with the Movement. When whites responded with outrage, SNCC let the program lapse. Another white volunteer, Phyllis Cunningham, argued that COFO should organize the Movement around the local people's needs, which she considered Freedom Schools, community centers, and health organizations. Several volunteers including Barbara Schwartzbaum complained about the "moratorium on direct action" because the order stifled local activism and rendered the Civil Rights Act meaningless if no one could force desegregation with sit-ins and protests. During the fall, the moratorium remained, though some locals defied it. As the excitement of Freedom Summer faded into a laborious voter registration project, some activists worried that the dull work would diminish the interest of the nation. Activists implored volunteers who had returned to their universities to form Friends of SNCC campus groups and sustain pressure on the federal government to intervene. One Laurel volunteer, Marion Davidson, worried that if the spotlight on Mississippi faded, progress would deteriorate and violence would escalate.⁵ Davidson's fear soon materialized.

The local assault against the twin terrors of white violence and racial injustice set the stage for the early battles of the war of attrition. On August 29, some 500 to 600 people gathered around the Ellisville courthouse in Jones County to witness the trial of

⁵ Quoting Barbara Schwartzbaum, "Perceptions on Hattiesburg Movement, n. d. CORE Papers vol. 126, Reel 25; Ibid., 1205-1207. Phyllis Cunningham, "Perceptions on Hattiesburg Movement," n. d., Lily M. Douglas, report, n. d., both in vol. 126, Reel 25, CORE Papers; Hattiesburg COFO-Very Active, Feb. 24, [1965], Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 145; "Flintridge Woman in South as Civil Rights Worker," *La Canada Valley Sun*, October 8, 1964, David Owen Papers, McCain, USM; Betty Garman to summer volunteer, n. d., Joseph & Nancy Ellin Freedom Summer Collection, Digital Archive, USM, [hereinafter cited as Ellin Collection]; Joseph Schwartz, interview by Shelia Michaels, July 24, 1999, MOHP Digital.

Klansman V. L. Lee, who was charged with beating David Gelfand at the Freedom Summer farewell picnic a week earlier. Once the mob formed around the activists, the court, facing a potentially explosive situation in the streets, postponed the trial. Jones County authorities never tried Lee for the crime. The permissive atmosphere encouraged whites to mount a violent offensive against blacks. In early September, 18-year-old African-American Luther Collins and three of his friends defied the moratorium on direct-action protests and sat at the front of a Hattiesburg city bus to test the Civil Rights Act signed two months earlier by President Lyndon Johnson. The driver held a gun to Collins's head and ordered him to move to the colored section. Collins and his friends exited the bus rather than suffer the continued indignities of segregation.⁶

Even those blacks who had generally avoided involvement in the Movement lived under the perpetual threat of white violence, particularly from white police officers. In early September, Officer James Owen, though lacking a warrant and probable cause, conducted an illegal search for whiskey by breaking into the home of a black suspect in the Hub City. When two of the home's occupants, Ruth Noble and her sister-in-law, Pauline Williams, tried to stop him, Owen grabbed Noble by the hair and punched her several times before transporting both women to jail where he again attacked Noble. Palmers Crossing remained the most infamous bastion of police brutality in Forrest

⁶ H. T. Richardson, Mississippi Bureau of Identification Case Report, re: whipping COFO worker David Gelfand, August 31, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, McCain, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]. To further substantiate that no action was taken by the courts in this incident, see, Brief of Contestants Urging the Vacating of the Contested Seats and the Holding of New Elections," Appendix, pp. 41a-43a, Mississippi Election Contest, 1965-1966, Thomas Abernathy Papers, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, Oxford [hereinafter cited as MFDP Congressional Challenge Brief, Abernathy Collection]; *The Voice of the Movement: The Freedom Voice of the Fifth Congressional District*, vol. 1, Issue, 13, September 12, 1964, Ellin Collection.

County under the strong arm of Constables Cotton Humphrey and Wilmer Kitchens who terrorized local blacks for their amusement. Hoping to add some excitement to their Labor Day shift, the constables burst into a local black pub owned by Bama Madison and searched for prey. Humphrey beat a disheveled obese black woman for sport. When he grew tired, he ordered several patrons to transport her to Kitchens' vehicle. Kitchens objected—she was “too filthy” to put in his car. Ignoring the pervasiveness of police brutality, the *Hattiesburg American* printed a front page article in September, praising the work of the local police in their dealings with the community.⁷ The white violence and white lies deepened disillusionment among many civil rights workers. As the fall progressed, the Movement began to stagnate.

Klan activities also waned in the Central Piney Woods. In the fall of 1964, although the White Knights kept surveillance on civil rights activities, the FBI investigations in Mississippi began to hamper Klan violence. Bowers warned Klansmen that since the Klan treasury lacked funds, anyone arrested after executing an unapproved project would have to pay their own legal fees. Bowers had reason to worry because the Klan faced increasing pressure from the FBI, Governor Paul Johnson, Jr., and the state highway patrol. When the Klan launched a bombing campaign in McComb in September, the FBI flooded the area, and with the cooperation of local law enforcement, arrested

⁷ Quoting *State of Mississippi v. Cloudies Shinall* (July 1965), case no. 6434, transcript, Mississippi Supreme Court appeal record (December 1965), case no. 43,866, 801-802, [hereafter cited as *Mississippi v. Shinall* (1965), transcript]. For police brutality in general, and the Shinall trial, see entire transcript. “A Job Well Done,” September 12, 1964, *The Voice of the Movement: The Freedom Voice of the Fifth Congressional District*, vol. 1, Issue, 13, Ellin Collection. WATS Report, September 5, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Hattiesburg COFO-Very Active, Ser. 15, Reel 38, both in, SNCC Papers. Barbara Schwartzbaum, Lily M. Douglas, and Phyllis Cunningham, “Perceptions on Hattiesburg Movement,” CORE Papers. For the rape of Shinall's lover, see Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 148-149.

three Klansmen in early October. Thirty-six miles away in Meadville, on November 6, agents and the highway patrol arrested two Klansman, James Ford Seale and Charles Marcus Edwards, for the murders of Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore whose bodies had turned up in a bayou near the Mississippi River during the search for the Neshoba civil rights workers that summer. However, none of the Klansmen in McComb or Meadville served time in prison for their crimes. The FBI turned the Meadville case over to state authorities, who refused to present it to a grand jury. Although a jury in McComb convicted several of the Klan bombers, Judge W. H. Watkins released the men on probation.⁸

The White Knights responded ambivalently to the investigations of the Invisible Empire. Some White Knights discussed murdering FBI agents and Department of Justice officials; they also called for the execution of Klan informants. Bowers, however, considered such a response a dangerous and foolish tactic and ordered his men to refrain from executing violent projects until after the Neshoba investigation concluded. Bowers suggested that as the activities of COFO and NAACP had diminished, the Klan should engage in a “cool down” period and focus on eradicating the enemies within its ranks, reorganizing the base, and raising money to expand its treasury. Toward that end, he ordered some units to disband and reorganize around core trusted members. He hoped that the purge would allow the Klan to grow stronger and more secretive and function in

⁸ FBI Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115, Helfrich Papers. Governor Paul Johnson, Jr., press release, October 29, 1964, Ser. II, Subseries 5; Charles E. Snodgrass to A. D. Morgan, November 6, 1964 and attached FBI Press Release, n. d., Ser. II, Subser. 10, both in PBJ Papers. Jerry Mitchell, “‘64 Suspects in Klan Murders Scoffs at Reinvestigation Talk,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 23, 2000, The Clarion-Ledger Online Archive. For Meadville case, see “Ex-Miss, Deputy Charged in ‘64 deaths,” *MSNBC.com*, January 24, 2007.

a more effective and clandestine manner when the civil rights activists resumed their activities. At a meeting on November 15, Bowers proposed a moratorium on violence for 90 days commencing on the first of December. Despite some opposition, the White Knights passed the resolution.⁹

As of November 16, klaverns had 14 days to execute any unfinished projects. In Jones County, one klavern quickly prepared an operation against the local labor union. Since World War II, the Congress of Industrial Organizations-American Federation of Labor, the International Woodworkers, and other unions had made tentative gains in Mississippi. Union officials responded with ambivalence to civil rights activism; they approved some protests and loathed others. In the Central Piney Woods, union representatives increasingly made a concerted effort to recruit equally black and white workers into the union. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Otis Matthews, financial secretary of the local International Woodworkers, attempted to integrate facilities at the Klan-infested Masonite plant in Laurel.¹⁰

The Jones County Klan decided to send the union a message. Around 9:00 p.m. on November 16, a large man referred to only by his ironic nickname—Tiny—along with Billy Boyd, Henry DeBoxtel, and an unidentified Klansmen followed Matthews as he departed the union hall. About a quarter mile away from a small bridge, Boyd dimmed

⁹ FBI Report, February 3, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 2, #157-18-115, Helfrich Papers.

¹⁰ For union work in Mississippi, see Claude Ramsay, memo n. d. and attached article, Pat Watters, “Workers, White & Black in Mississippi,” *Dissent Magazine*, 3 (Winter 1972), Mississippi AFL-CIO Records, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. For Otis Matthews work that angered the Klan see, Billy Roy Pitts, statement, March 12, 1968, FBI Report, March 19, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-239, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as Pitts, statement, vol. 2, #157-5512-239].

his headlights alerting Tommy Thornton, who had been waiting for the signal on the other side. Thornton drove onto the bridge, raised his hood, and pretended to work on his vehicle as Matthews approached. Once Boyd parked on the bridge behind Matthews successfully trapping him between the two automobiles, his passengers raced toward Matthews's vehicle. DeBoxtel yanked open the driver's door, placed a gun against Matthews's head, and forced him to move into the center seat as the other Klansmen slid into the front and back seats. At first thinking that they planned to rob him, Matthews insisted he had no money. When they threatened to murder him unless he "shut his mouth," he fell silent and remained quiet as they quickly bound and blindfolded him.¹¹

The Klansmen transported Matthews to a dead end road, dragged him from the vehicle, and surrounded him. DeBoxtel yanked down Matthews's pants and forced him to lie face down on the ground. Then he placed his pistol on the back of Matthew's head and informed him "we [are] the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan . . . [and] we [are] going to whip [your] ass because [you are] trying to integrate the showers and other facilities at the Masonite Corporation." Matthews tried to persuade the men to let him go. He insisted they were making a "big mistake," and if they released him they could work out their problems. But the Klansmen laughed at his futile threats. DeBoxtel threatened to kill Matthews if he failed to "straighten things out." Tiny, wielding a Black Annie—a thick leather strap with holes in it—stepped forward to deliver the emasculating lesson. Using all the strength of his 200-pound body, he lashed Matthews 15 times. Afterward, Boyd poured horse liniment on Matthews' torn and blistered flesh. While Pitts removed the spark plug and coil wires from Matthews' vehicle, DeBoxtel warned the beaten union

¹¹ Pitts, statement, vol. 2, #157-5512-239.

man that if he reported the incident they would kill him. Matthews defied their orders and reported the attack to local law enforcement.¹²

In response to the assault, as well as a failed attempt by Klansmen to abduct Matthews two days later, 16 local union officers in an official statement in the *Laurel Leader-Call* notified the Klan that “fear of verbal denouncement, physical assault or even death [will never] deter us from following a reasonable, practical, sound course.” They encouraged union members to arm themselves and warned that if Klansmen “wish to turn our community into an armed camp, disregard law and order and soak our soil in blood, we are prepared to help them.” In a public harangue, Jones County Sheriff Merrill Pickering pledged to find and prosecute the Klan perpetrators: “We’re not going to tolerate this. We’re not going to let hoodlums enforce the laws in this county. When they’re apprehended, they’ll be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.” Local law enforcement failed to apprehend or punish anyone for Matthews’s beating.¹³

Still, the Klan had reason to worry when the FBI moved against the White Knights in the Neshoba case. On December 4, FBI agents began arresting suspects, and on January 15 a federal grand jury in Jackson handed down 18 indictments. The original indictment failed to name Bowers, but the FBI knew that he ordered the killings of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney. Bowers used his power over the White Knights to protect himself. He ordered the collection of all the Klan

¹² Ibid. “Laurel Labor Leader Beaten,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 19, 1964.

¹³ First and second quotes, “Labor Union Chief Bares Seizure Plot,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, November 20, 1964, A. E. Cox Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Cox Collection and Mitchell, MSU]; all other quotes, “Laurel Labor Leader Beaten,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 19, 1964.

fundraising jugs kept in stores and restaurants. Several Klansmen were outraged because they suspected he planned to use all the funds for his own defense. Forrest County Klansmen Mordaunt Hamilton accused Bowers of misusing Klan funds and threatened to beat him. Several other Klansmen attacked Bowers' character. Some Klansmen maligned him as a communist; others attacked his sexuality. One Klansman called Bowers a "thieving queer" and insinuated that he was having a homosexual affair with his roommate and business partner, Robert Larson. Bowers fought back. He accused his detractors of becoming FBI informants and expelled some of them. Bowers realized, however, that he had to make concessions if he wanted to maintain control over the Invisible Empire. To pacify disgruntled members, on February 19 Bowers pledged a more equitable distribution of funds, and he reinstated one expelled Klansman.¹⁴ Although he had quashed an internal revolt, he had failed to stop law enforcement attacks on his Invisible Empire.

State officials generally supported the FBI's efforts against the Klan. The Director of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Erle Johnston, informed the Mississippi Sheriff's Association that the state was "in a period of transition" on the race issue. Regardless of their passions, they had to accept some changes. As Mississippians could never create a prosperous future by vainly clinging to the past, Johnston emphasized the importance of sustaining law and order to prove that Mississippi could

¹⁴ Quoting FBI August 27, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-282, Helfrich Papers. For discussion of arrests and indictments, see Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 198-201, 215-216, 258-259. For indictments see, Preliminary Prosecutive Action, Supplemental Prosecutive Summary, Section 58, FBI Files #44-25706-12, MIBURN, 1-12, Federal Bureau of Investigation Central Records System, Washington D. C., Microfilm.

solve its criminal cases. On December 8, 1964, the Mississippi Sheriff's Association in a formal resolution pledged its support, "cooperation and assistance" to J. Edgar Hoover and ordered the state's citizenry to allow law enforcement officials to maintain order. State legislators passed a bill that authorized the creation of a law enforcement training academy, increased the number of police, and provided greater powers to the Mississippi Highway Patrol to sustain law and order. Still, state officials along with ordinary white citizens, remained as opposed to black liberation as ever, and they bitterly opposed President Johnson's reelection. On November 4, white Mississippi along with the rest of the Deep South defected from the Democratic Party and voted for Barry Goldwater, who had promised to reinstate state sovereignty. In Mississippi, Goldwater defeated Johnson 354,459 to 52,538 votes. Forrest Countians favored Goldwater by a 9 to 1 margin and Jones Countians by 6 to 1. Despite the South's defection, Johnson won the presidency in a landslide.¹⁵

Disappointed but undefeated, state and local authorities attempted to circumvent federal civil rights legislation, and they used their power to maintain law and order to suppress activism. To avoid compliance with the *Brown* decision and the Civil Rights Act, white Mississippi officials encouraged school boards to launch lawsuits against integration. Section VI of the Civil Rights Act prevented the federal government from

¹⁵ First quote, W. F. Minor, "Concern Over State's National 'Image' Noted," *The Times Picayune*, December 13, 1964, Klaus & Elisabeth Spears Papers, McCain, USM; second quote, Resolutions by Mississippi Sheriffs Association, December 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers. "Johnson Victory Nears Record 15 Million Mark," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 4, 1964. T. B. Birdsong, Commending the Legislature of the State of Mississippi, Paul B. Johnson, and Joe T. Patterson, December 8, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10; J. Y. Thomas, Sovereignty Commission Report, December 3, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 9; Charles E. Snodgrass to A. D. Morgan, December 4, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 10, all in PBJ Papers.

denying federal funds to any school involved in desegregation litigation. If white officials lacked the power to prevent integration, they could stall its implementation. Governor Johnson discouraged school boards from signing integration compliance pledges. Johnson also persisted in his fight against the desegregation of public accommodations by supporting an Atlanta case challenging the constitutional validity of the bill in the U. S. Supreme Court. He fought a losing battle. On December 14, the justices unanimously affirmed the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act's public accommodation's provision and decreed that states must dismiss charges against persons who had violated segregation laws prior to their nullification by the federal act. On December 16, Governor Johnson publicly denounced the decision as a "dangerous doctrine."¹⁶ Unquestionably, the court's constitutional affirmation of the bill imperiled segregation, one of the most significant fortifications of white power. Nevertheless, until blacks integrated white facilities, the law proved meaningless.

Determined to enforce Mississippi's compliance with the bill, activists in the Central Piney Woods ended the moratorium on direct-action and launched a series of sit-ins that winter. Their efforts breathed life back into the local Movements, but it also ignited the rage of police, white mobs, and the Klan. The uneasy stagnation settling over the Central Piney Woods in the fall of 1964 ended. COFO launched the first battle in

¹⁶ Quoting Governor Paul Johnson, Jr., press release, December 16, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 5, PBJ Papers. "September Integration Aim for Aided Schools," *Hattiesburg American*, February 5, 1965; "I Would Not Sign the Compliance Thing,"—PBJ," *Hattiesburg American*, February 15, 1965; Drew Pearson, "Rights Loophole Exploited," January 30, 1965, Rabbi David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain, USM; "CR measure Being Put to Test Across Nation," *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964; James Saggus, "Governor Advises Citizens Not to Comply with Law Until Tested," *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 1964; "1964 Civil Rights Act Survives Supreme Test," *Hattiesburg American*, December 14, 1964.

mid-December in Jones County, when two white volunteers, two Laurel blacks, and two Hattiesburg blacks staged a sit-in at the Travel Inn. Attorney for the Travel Inn, Paul Swartzfager, who had prosecuted Howard Wash, Willie McGee, and Davis Knight, terminated the sit-in by providing local policemen with warrants, which they used to arrest the activists. The protesters employed their nonviolent resistance training to force the police to drag them out of the restaurant, across the street, and up two flights of stairs to the police station. Officers assaulted two of the black activists and dragged one of the white volunteers by his hair and neck all the way to the station. Authorities charged all six of the protesters with breach of peace and two with resisting arrest. On December 22, the judge ordered their bonds forfeited for failing to appear in court. As usual in civil rights cases, the court neglected to notify Jess R. Brown, the attorney for the activists, of the hearing date so the judge could forfeit the bond.¹⁷

Undeterred, activists continued to confront Swartzfager. In late December, five COFO workers and 15 locals, including Eberta Spinks, staged a sit-in at the Pinehurst Coffee Shop owned by Swartzfager. When they sat down, the manager angrily warned them, "If you don't get up and get out of here, we're going to call the police." Spinks responded, "We're going to stay right here." After a moment, she told him, "It looks like to me the more you serve, the more money you'd make here and you'd be glad to serve anybody." The manager ignored her, and soon the police arrived and arrested all of the protesters on breach of peace charges. In addition, officers charged two of the protesters

¹⁷ WATS Report, December 16 and 17, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. Please note that SNCC reports misspell Swartzfager's name. Odell McRae, "Sit-In Group's Bonds Canceled," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 22, 1964; For Swartzfager and his family's various businesses and professional work, see *Laurel City Directory, 1945-1946* (Corpus Christi, Texas: C. B. Page Directory Co., 1964), and *Laurel City Directory, 1967* (Richmond, R. L. Polk & Co., 1967), both in McCain, USM.

with indecent exposure and one with alcohol possession, though they lacked evidence to substantiate the charges. From jail, Spinks contacted her daughter. When her daughter expressed concern, Spinks responded loud enough for the jailers to hear, "Don't be afraid. . . ain't nothing going to happen to us. . . . If anything happens to us, blood's going to run down the street like water."¹⁸

To protest the unlawful detention of their compatriots, 12 activists arrived outside the Laurel City Jail on Christmas Day where they lit candles, knelt in prayer, and sang Freedom songs and Christmas carols. Police officers tried to scare away the demonstrators by shouting "the Klan is coming." When the tactic failed, one officer approached the kneeling demonstrators and repeatedly kicked them. Another officer drove his police vehicle toward the kneeling activists, but he slammed on his breaks just before hitting them. A crowd of whites surrounded the protesters, and one of them shouted, "If I had a shotgun, I'd shoot them damn niggers." After 20 minutes police arrested the activists. The group refused bail to protest their arrest.¹⁹

Police brutality and harassment persisted that winter and taught many of the remaining volunteers the fear blacks had known all their lives. While white volunteer Joseph Schwarz drove through a white neighborhood, officers pulled him over and searched his vehicle. Finding a book on the Movement, they asked him if he supported racial mixing. When Schwarz inquired about their opinion on the topic, one officer replied, "Red birds and blue birds don't mix." Schwarz responded "Men aren't birds." Infuriated, the officer punched him and threatened to kill him. Afterward, Schwarz

¹⁸ Quoting Eberta Spinks, interview by Kim Adams, Spring 1995, MOHP Digital. WATS Report, December 28, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

¹⁹ WATS Report, December 28, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

understood how quickly terror and oppression could change a person. Schwarz noted that after the assault, “my reaction was leave me alone. I don’t want any trouble. I was reluctant to go to the police station to report it.” He had only lived under Mississippi absolutism for a short time, and he could leave whenever he wanted; yet his fear nearly paralyzed him into passivity. He developed a heightened respect for locals who joined the Movement, for they would suffer long after he and the other activists departed.²⁰

Violence escalated that winter as activists increased their direct-action protests. In early 1965, the Laurel branch of the NAACP stepped up its voter registration drive, and on January 14, 15 local Jones county residents traveled to the courthouse in Laurel where they registered. Outside, a crowd of white men gathered. That afternoon, a white activist—Ed Dubinsky, a professor from Tulane accompanying the local blacks—exited the courthouse and two white men in the mob knocked him to the ground. As they repeatedly kicked him, Sheriff Merle Pickering—who had earlier promised to preserve law and order in the wake of the Klan beating of the union man Otis Matthews—shouted, “Atta boy, get ’em, get ’em.” The beating left Dubinsky with several bruises, gashes on his forehead, and cuts on his hands. Although Dubinsky never tried to defend himself, officers arrested him as well as his attackers.²¹

In Hattiesburg, violence also exploded that winter. On January 21, four white

²⁰ First and second quotes, COFO Report, “Rights Worker Beaten by Police in Hattiesburg: Officer Threatens to Kill Him,” n. d., Ellin Collection; last quote, Joseph Schwartz to Bea and Izakkk, n. d., Joseph Schwartz Papers, McCain, USM.

²¹ Quoting WATS Report, January 14, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. B. E. Murph to Gloster Current, January 13, 1965, Pt. 27, Ser. A, Reel 10; Ruby Hurley to Gloster Current, March 19, 1965, Pt. 25, Ser. B, Reel 4, Charles Evers to Ruby Hurley, March 3, 1965, Pt. 25, Ser. D, Reel 14, all in Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers].

activists attended a publicly advertised White Citizens Council meeting held in the Forrest County courthouse. An attorney in Forrest County presided over the meeting, which featured special guests, including council founder Robert Patterson. After an hour, one of the council members recognized three of the activists. He jumped to his feet, pointed at the activists, and shouted, “There are three of them [outsiders] right here.” The unrecognized activist stood up and said “no, four.” The council members mobbed them. One council member smashed a chair over an interloper’s head. Police neglected to make any arrests. Within days of the courthouse attack, 20 activists staged a sit-in at Lea’s Restaurant in Hattiesburg. The owner contacted Mayor Claude Pittman and the police, but they informed him that he had to comply with the Civil Rights Act. In the meantime, some 30 white men surrounded the protesters and warned, “We won’t beat you up too bad.” Before the activists could escape, a patron threw coffee in the face of a protestor. Days later another 15 activists—including two northern whites, Joseph Schwarz and Richard Kelly, and local black teenager, Robert Abrams—returned to Lea’s, but the manager refused to serve them. The group remained for an hour until Klansman Mordaunt Hamilton, who had been sitting in the restaurant, strolled toward the activists and hit Schwarz in the head, knocking him off of his chair. Then he beat Kelly and Abrams. The group fled the restaurant, but Hamilton followed. He kicked Kelly and then punched Sandy Leigh, who had just walked out of the post office toward the group. Later that day, when a black busboy with no ties to the Movement, entered the restaurant to start his shift, a white man punched him. At that moment, all of the black employees—Lea’s two busboys, a short order cook, and a dishwasher—quit in protest.²²

²² First and second quotes, WATS Report, January 21, 1965; third quote, WATS

Not surprisingly, the judge found Hamilton not guilty of assaulting Schwarz. The Klansman stalked proudly out of the courtroom. When he saw Schwarz, who had just testified against him, he charged him and beat him along with his two companions. When policemen arrested Hamilton, the activists followed them to the police station to ensure that they filed charges. At the station, in full view of police, Hamilton spat in the faces of the activists and called them cowards. On January 29, Hamilton failed to appear for one of his many assault and battery hearings, forfeiting his \$75 bond. Although the judge allowed activists—10 ministers and 25 locals—attending the trial to sit in the courtroom in an “integrated group,” which seemed a progressive step, the court dismissed the case against Hamilton. The court refused to find Hamilton guilty on any of his numerous battery charges. The activists included these incidents in their record of violent attacks, which they sent habitually to the Department of Justice. That spring the abundance of records testifying to white violence and lawlessness used to prevent blacks from exercising their civil and political rights proved quite useful.²³

The MFDP used such records in its efforts to unseat the five United States Congressmen from Mississippi. In November 1964, voters in 52 counties participating in

Report, January 21, 1965, both in Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. WATS Report, January 23, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Incident Summary, Hattiesburg, January 21, 1965, Ser. III, Reel 23, Congress of Racial Equality Archives, Papers, Addendum, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as CORE Papers, Addendum]; “Citizens Council Meeting Slated Here Thursday Night,” January 20, 1965; “Minister, COFO Workers Report Assault Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1965.

²³ Quoting WATS Report, January 29, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers. WATS Report, January 23, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Incident Summary, January 28, 1965, Ser. 15, Reel 39; WATS Report, January 25, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15; Affidavit by James Kempfer, January 26, 1965, and affidavit by Emanuel Logalbo, January 27, 1965, Ser. 15, Reel 38, all in SNCC Papers. “Swift Justice,” *Delta Ministry Reports*, March 1967, Delta Ministry Vertical File, McCain, USM.

the mock election selected MFDP candidates, including Victoria Gray, for U.S. Congress. On January 4, 1965, the MFDP representatives requested that Congress seat them rather than the Regular Democrats as the MFDP, unlike the regulars, were elected in a lawful process. They stressed that Mississippi registrars, in a systematic effort to ensure black disfranchisement and election of segregationists, refused to register black voters who had not paid poll taxes—which was only a requirement for state, not federal elections. Furthermore, registrars delayed certification of voters to prevent their participation. Conversely, the MFDP allowed all eligible persons regardless of race to vote in its election process. House members ruled that the MFDP had nine months to collect supporting evidence before presenting its arguments to the House Subcommittee on Elections in September 1965. In the spring, some 150 lawyers recruited by the MFDP held hearings across the state at which they took depositions from 400 witnesses and generated some 10,000 pages of testimony filled with familiar stories of intimidation, discrimination, and violence.²⁴

Persistent voter discrimination in Forrest and Jones Counties provided lawyers with a wealth of evidence to present throughout the hearings. Testimony during the MFDP hearings revealed that Forrest County registrar Theron Lynd still refused to comply with court orders to register black applicants; and Jones County registrar Leonard Caves publicly declared that he would never register any blacks connected with the Movement. Caves physically threatened COFO workers, ordered blacks out of the

²⁴ MFDP Congressional Challenge - Fact Sheet, Pt. 2, Reel 9, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Papers, Microfilm, Martin Luther King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as SCLC Papers]; MFDP Congressional Challenge Brief, Abernathy Collection; “Federal Commission Opens State Hearings,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 10, 1965; Dittmer, *Local People*, 338-349; Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count* (Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 26.

courthouse, and fired his housekeeper after she tried to register. Caves denied all such accusations as well as insinuations that he belonged to the Klan or the Citizens Council. He claimed that “to my knowledge we don’t have a Ku Klux Klan.” The statement was patently absurd. Local and nationwide newspapers had reported on Bowers’ White Knights headquartered in Laurel since they bombed the *Laurel Leader-Call* in May 1964, and citizens became well aware of the FBI agents and Mississippi Highway patrolman who investigated the bombing. During MFDP’s investigation, a series of local people, staff members, and volunteers testified about the intimidation and beatings they had suffered at the hands of white mobs, the Klan, and police when they attempted to register, engaged in political activities, protested discrimination, staged sit-ins, or participated in voter registration drives.²⁵

Meanwhile, the U. S. Civil Rights Commission also investigated racial intimidation in Mississippi. During commission hearings in Jackson, investigators presented their reports, and 100 Mississippians, including several persons from Jones and Forrest Counties, testified. They reported that Jones County citizens who engaged in lawful sit-ins to test the Civil Rights of 1964 during the summer and fall of 1964 had suffered from racial violence and police neglect. Gangs of white men routinely gathered outside establishments where sit-ins occurred and assaulted the activists. The investigators noted that the beating of Larry McGill and Jessie Harrington, who had tried to desegregate the lunch counter at S. H. Kress department store during Freedom

²⁵ Quoting “Caves Says He Practices Fair Registration Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 12, 1965. MFDP Congressional Challenge Brief, Appendix, 37a-38a, 40a-45a, Abernathy Collection; WATS Reports, February 8, 10, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Elliott Chaze, “Negro Voter Claims Run-around at Democratic Precinct Meeting,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1965.

Summer, proved one of the more serious incidents. Laurel's Chief of Police L. C. Nix had witnessed the attack and though he had arrested one of the perpetrators, he had failed to take further action when the defendant neglected to appear in court. On the stand, Nix testified that he did not consider the attack that serious and described it as "routine" and "just an assault." Nix also admitted that in December 1964, he had arrested a group of activists who had staged a sit-in at the Pinehurst Coffee Shop. When the commission asked him if he understood that he made an oath pledging to protect the Constitution of the United States and that as a law enforcement officer he must enforce the laws of the land, he insisted that his job required him to enforce state and local laws, not integration rulings. The commission also received an affidavit from Rabbi Lelyveld regarding the beating he had suffered during Freedom Summer in Hattiesburg and his interrogation by Finch at the trial.²⁶

The white establishment in Mississippi mobilized to undermine the Civil Rights Commission and MFDP hearings. Governor Johnson called on state officials, businessmen, and community leaders to testify before the commission to provide the "Mississippi story." He claimed that the MFDP tale "contained many lies." Several white officials, including Governor Johnson, appeared before the commission and flatly denied that the state officials discriminated against black citizens. Senator James O. Eastland employed his usual red-baiting tactics and accused 20 MFDP lawyers, including Ben Margolis, of being affiliated with the communist party. Margolis denied the charge and duly noted, "Mr. Eastland calls many people a communist when they disagree with his

²⁶ Quoting U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Law Enforcement, A Report On Equal Protection in the South* (Washington D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 45-46; *Ibid.*, 1-4, 53, 64-65, [hereafter cited as *Civil Rights Commission, A Report on Equal Protection in the South*].

philosophy.”²⁷

The white patriarchs in the Central Piney Woods also fought fiercely against the MFDP challenge as they struggled to protect its favored son, Congressman William Colmer. Lawyers involved in helping Colmer defeat the challenge, either by setting up special meetings to discuss a strategy or actually working on the case, included whites harboring conservative/radical racial mentalities like Jimmy Finch (who framed Clyde Kennard), E. K. Collins (who prosecuted Willie McGee), Carroll Gartin (who ensured Willie McGee’s execution), and Harold Melvin and Leonard Melvin, Jr., (who later defended a Jones County Klansman in a murder trial). Yet some lawyers on the case, including Quitman Ross, who had defended Davis Knight in his miscegenation case, as well as Judge Darwin Maples, Charles Pickering, and Judge W. O. Dillard, were moderates; some of them later became racial progressives who acquired reputations for fighting the Klan and white supremacy.²⁸

While the MFDP and the civil rights commission attacked the racial caste system in legal arenas, activists continued to challenge white supremacist oppression in public spaces. In Hattiesburg, on February 15, 1965, J. C. Fairley sent a letter to Mayor Pittman informing him that since the U. S. Supreme Court had upheld the public accommodations section of the Civil Rights Act, members of the Forrest County NAACP planned to exercise their rights to patronize previously segregated restaurants and expected

²⁷ First and second quote, “Federal Commission Opens State Hearings,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 10, 1965; third quote, “Caves Says He Practices Fair Registration Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 12, 1965.

²⁸ Maurice Danton to William Colmer, February 7, 1965; William Colmer to Judge Darwin Maples, February 22, 1965, both in William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Colmer Papers].

protection. Fairley sent a carbon copy of the letter to the Department of Justice, the chief of police, the city commissioners, the sheriff, the board of supervisors, the chamber of commerce, and the *Hattiesburg American*. On February 23, the NAACP launched 14 tests in Forrest County. Two groups of blacks arrived at the Hattiesburg Public Library where they applied for library cards. Around 30 black people tested Kamper Park without incident, while another group successfully desegregated one motel. Blacks in groups of six staged sit-ins at various restaurants and received service in eight of the 14 establishments. At one restaurant, when white servers refused to wait on the group, a black kitchen worker served the delegation. When a local movie theater refused to permit blacks entrance, the rejected group left quietly with plans to sue. The well-planned protests were the largest sit-ins in Hattiesburg yet, and they occurred without violent reprisals or arrests. Laurel activists also continued to stage sit-ins throughout the spring. During March 1965, a group of nine activists integrated a Laurel bowling alley and several restaurants.²⁹

Mississippi media capitalized on these events to portray the state as a place of law and order. In the *Hattiesburg American*, columnist James Saggus argued that Mississippi tried to show the nation and the world it was changing, and he pointed to progress in the fields of voter registration and law enforcement. He concluded that Mississippi whites increasingly accepted that “federal laws cover Mississippi whether Mississippi agrees with them or not.” Of course, Saggus ignored the litany of violent attacks and the many

²⁹ J. C. Fairley to Mayor Claude F. Pittman, February 15, 1965, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM; “NAACP Plans Compliance Tests Here Starting Feb. 23,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 16, 1965; “Compliance Tests Here Begin Quietly,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 23, 1965; “Compliance Tests to Continue,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 24, 1965; WATS Report, March 17, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers.

discriminatory actions that persisted in the Central Piney Woods, beginning with a resurgence of Klan assaults. On February 9, an unknown assailant fired shots into the SNCC office in Laurel. A week later, someone firebombed the office which demolished the structure, destroyed 2,000 library books and a mimeograph machine, and burned office records. On March 5, the Klan firebombed the home of Brewell Curie because he had hosted a COFO picnic at his home during Freedom Summer, and because his son shot at the Klansmen who tried to kill them. The bomb blew out the windows on the first floor and burned part of a wall. Bowers' moratorium on violence was over.³⁰

The continued violence in Mississippi, as well as the Commission and MFDP hearings, which once again drew national attention to voter discrimination and white supremacist violence throughout the South, revealed a great need for stronger federal action. When the voting rights march in Selma, Alabama that March became mired in violence, it forced the federal government into action. On March 15, President Johnson called on Congress to pass a Voting Rights Act to strike down barriers to black suffrage, and to send federal registrars into the intransigent southern districts to prevent discrimination. He declared that blacks "have awakened the conscience of this nation. . . . to injustice . . . their cause must be our cause too. Because it's not just Negroes, but really it's all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we

³⁰ Quoting James Saggus, "Mississippi Making Effort to Show Change," *Hattiesburg American*, February 27, 1965; FBI Report, February 17, 1966, Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-107, Helfrich Papers; MFDP Congressional Challenge Brief, Appendix, pp. 41a-43a, Abernathy Papers. WATS Report, March 5, 1965, Ser. 7, Reel 15; SNCC Incident Summary, Feb 4 - March 2, 1965, Ser. 1, Reel 56, both in SNCC Papers. "The Laurel Mississippi Freedom House," *The Student Voice*, March 5, 1965, in Mississippi Sovereignty Commission Report, Sovereignty Commission Record #99-28-0-42-4-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Digital Archive, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR#, MDAH].

shall overcome.” Although progressives throughout the nation approved of civil rights legislation, many called for greater action to fight white violence. A *New York Post* journalist argued that since Mississippi and Alabama had abdicated control to terrorists, the rest of the nation must reexamine the standard form of federalism and the federal government should develop a “federal police force to deal with violations of civil rights.”³¹

Many white Mississippians perceived the Voting Rights Act and the proposals for a federal police force as signs of rising communist influence. In an effort to defeat the proposed voting rights bill, Mississippi politicians continued to red-bait the Civil Rights Movement. As they had in the wake of the proposed Civil Rights Act (1964), thousands of white Mississippians, including many citizens of the Central Piney Woods, wrote their congressmen and senators to oppose the “Civil Wrongs Bill.” One woman from Hattiesburg castigated the bill as “communist-inspired,” and worried that the federal government would attack the Ku Klux Klan, while allowing civil rights organizations, which she considered full of communists, to flourish. Another Hattiesburg citizen sent Colmer a petition that demanded the federal government investigate the “Communist infiltration of the Civil Rights Movement.”³²

³¹ First quote, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, Address to Congress, March 15, 1965, American Experience, The Presidents, Lyndon Baines Johnson, PBS, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/36_1_johnson/psources/ps_overcome.html (accessed June 2004); second quote, “The Law and the Klan,” *The New York Post*, March 29, 1965. Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-352; 78 Stat. 241), United States Congress, in *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November 1984, 54-71, John C. Stennis Collection, Ser. 43, Mitchell, MSU, [hereinafter cited as Stennis Collection]. Parker, *Black Votes Count*, 29.

³² First quote repeated in the many letters to Colmer opposing Voting Rights Act (1965), Colmer Papers; second, quote Ruth Gibson to John Stennis, March 27, 1965,

Colmer inflamed such passions. He labeled SNCC a group dominated by communist thought and involved in the effort with COFO and dissident lawyer groups to unseat him and the other Mississippi Congressmen. Colmer had made several efforts to force the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate SNCC, but he contended the Johnson Administration avoided such actions because it needed the black vote. The *Hattiesburg American* also employed red-baiting tactics to discredit the Movement, civil rights legislation, and the Democratic Party. On April 22, the newspaper reprinted an article by Dr. Henry J. Taylor which ridiculously claimed that the Communist Party USA wrote portions of the Voting Rights Bill. Many whites in Forrest County responded to the bill by defecting from the Democratic Party, and on June 8 Hattiesburg elected its first Republican mayor, Paul E. Grady.³³

Whites also grew outraged when on June 16, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals finally ruled on the Theron Lynd case, which had been pending since the spring of 1964, and ordered registrar Lynd to review some 350 rejected applicants and immediately register persons meeting the registration requirements. Lynd must also assist all prospective voters with the application process, immediately inform applicants of their acceptance or rejection, and explain to those rejected the process for reapplying. The court ordered that those applicants rejected by Lynd had 20 days to contest the decision to the court. The judges further instructed Lynd to supply the court and the plaintiffs' attorneys with a written report containing the names and races of each applicant and the

Stennis Collection; third quote, Petition attached to letter, Mrs. J. to W. McArthur, to William Colmer, n. d., Colmer Papers.

³³ William Colmer to S. A. Hendry, April 14, 1965, Colmer Papers; "Hattiesburg Elects its First Republican Mayor," *Hattiesburg American*, June 9, 1965; "Commie Project," *Hattiesburg American*, April 22, 1963.

disposition of each application. The new court order terrified Hattiesburg's city fathers, who feared that the black vote could profoundly alter the power structure. On July 9, journalist Elliott Chaze used the front page of the *Hattiesburg American* to inform whites that 300 blacks and only 10 whites had registered to vote in Forrest County since the June court order. Chaze chastised whites for their apathy and implored them to register.

Whites far outnumbered blacks in Hattiesburg, but Chaze worried that if blacks continued to register in large numbers while whites remained apathetic, blacks could usurp political power in the city. On July 10, Chaze applauded 10 whites for heeding his call and registering to vote the day before. He also pointed out, however, that 29 blacks had also registered. White enthusiasm, he warned must surpass that of blacks.³⁴

The Klan planned to diminish the trend toward black enfranchisement through a massive escalation of its terror campaign. Klan violence proliferated in 1965 and 1966, with 50 recorded incidents of Klan assaults in Laurel alone, including house bombings, drive-by shootings, store burnings, and continuous attacks on the local COFO house. On the dark early morning hours of July 1, Klansmen launched the first of their summer assaults in Laurel by igniting six fires which destroyed the Big R Drive-In and 13 houses in a black community—the Newcomers Quarters. The Klan used the fires as a decoy—drawing all the fire trucks in Laurel to the area while Klansmen hit their most important targets—the COFO headquarters on Churchton Street in Jones County, the Laurel

³⁴ Quoting *United States v. Theron Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County and the State of Mississippi* (June 16, 1965), case no. 22477, transcript, 13, Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, *The United States of America v. Theron C. Lynd* Collection, USM, [hereinafter cited as *US v. Lynd* (June 1965), transcript]. “Whites Begin to Wake up and Register,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 1965; Elliott Chaze, “Whites Unmoved So Far by Rapid Negro Registration,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 8, 1965; Loren C. Brooks to SAC (Jackson), June 14, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-255, Helfrich Papers.

Freedom School, and the MFDP office. That same night, the Klan burned crosses in nearly every county in Mississippi. In the Central Piney Woods, the Klan displayed its powerful presence by lighting 12 crosses in Jones County and five in Forrest County.³⁵

In the wake of the attacks, the Jones County District Attorney W. O. “Chet” Dillard and Sheriff Merrill Pickering warned the perpetrators that the city and county would not tolerate Klan violence. Sheriff Pickering hired four new men to work undercover in the Klan investigation, and his department also worked in conjunction with FBI agents, the Mississippi Highway Patrol, the Mississippi state Marshal, and the Laurel Police Department. Lawmen patrolled the highways to prevent night riding violence. The patrolman, however, failed to discourage Bowers. During a state meeting held on July 11, 1965, Bowers summoned the Klan to execute a violent project every week in a different geographical area of Mississippi in order to confound the FBI and disperse their agents.³⁶

Jones County Klaverns heeded Bowers’ orders and launched projects inside and outside their jurisdiction. One summer night in 1965, Exalted Cyclops of the Laurel Klavern, Cecil Sessum, called one of his men, Billy Roy Pitts, and ordered him to gather his dogs as they were going hunting, which was their code for a Klan project. Soon after, Sessum along with Pitts, Charles Clifford Wilson, William Smith, Tommy Thornton,

³⁵ Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 71; “6 Fires Take Heavy Damage Toll In City,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 1, 1965; “Stop Burnings, Officials War,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1965; Running Incident Summary for the Month of July 1965, Ser. 1, Reel 56, SNCC Papers; “Crosses Burn Here and Throughout the State,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 2, 1965; Charles Pickering, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), September 7, 2007, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792 (2006), 795, MOHP.

³⁶ “Stop Burnings, Officials Warn,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1965; “4 Undercover Men Join Fire Probers,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 3, 1965; FBI Supplemental Summary Report, January 7, 1966 Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-393, Helfrich Papers.

Henry DeBoxtel, Lamar Lowe, and Billy Moss drove in two vehicles to a black home in Columbia. Sessum, Lowe, and Thornton departed the vehicle driven by Moss, raced toward the home, hurled gasoline-filled jugs under the porch, and set them on fire. After the first crew departed, Wilson drove his vehicle slowly past the burning house while DeBoxtel, Smith, and Pitts shot into the home. Pitts never knew the name of the man he attacked. It hardly mattered. He would enthusiastically participate in many more such attacks in the future. The targets changed. The mission remained the same.³⁷

Some whites, such as 19-year-old Norman Cannon, perceived the racist lawlessness that plagued the Central Piney Woods as providing a permissive atmosphere for all sorts of assaults against blacks. On July 13, 1965, Cannon drove into an impoverished black neighborhood in Hattiesburg; his eyes scanning the rows of dilapidated shotgun houses on Short Francis Street and then he saw what he considered the perfect target—a 15-year-old black girl. Her name was Rosa Lee Coates, and she lived with her grandmother in one of the tiny shacks. He lured her into his vehicle under the ruse that he desired a babysitter for his child and would drive her to his home. Coates grew concerned when he started driving toward U. S. 49 and asked where he was taking her. He ordered her to shut her mouth and threatened to kill her if she kept talking. When Cannon stopped at a stoplight on Hardy Street, Coates tried to open the door, but he grabbed her and slammed the door on her foot as he yanked it shut.

Cannon drove Coates out of the city and onto lonely country roads, stopping in

³⁷ Billy Roy Pitts Statement, February 29, 1968, FBI Report, March 6, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-231, Helfrich Papers. For examples of Pitts' projects with the Klan, see FBI Report, November 1, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-177, and Billy Roy Pitts interview, attached to FBI Memo to SAC, Jackson, January 12, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 3, #44-1512-3685, all in Helfrich Papers. "Killed by the Klan."

the isolated woods. He walked around to the passenger's side and ordered her out of the vehicle. Instead, she struggled quickly across the seat to the driver's side, escaped the vehicle and ran. But she slipped in the mud. She scrambled to her feet and ran again, but by that time, Cannon was gaining ground on her. Within moments he grabbed her by her dress and yanked her toward him. When she tried to pull away, he smacked her hard on the side of her face and held a knife to her neck, threatening to sever her head from her body if she refused him. He tore off her clothes and threw her onto the ground. As he raped her, he kept one hand on the knife. Afterward, he forced her to lie on her stomach as he slipped inside his vehicle and drove away.³⁸

Cannon misjudged his place in the ambivalent racial atmosphere in the summer of 1965. He had a criminal record for burglary, and he lacked powerful friends and financial resources. MHP Officer H. T. Richardson assisted Sheriff Bud Gray and Deputy Sheriff T. A. Woodward in the investigation. Within a few days, officers arrested Cannon, and Coates identified him as her rapist. Cannon pled innocent. Surprisingly, Jimmy Finch, who had prosecuted many activists including Clyde Kennard on trumped up charges, and Jimmy Dukes, who also had a long record of prosecuting activists, wielded all of their considerable legal skills to prosecute Cannon. White juries had never convicted a white man of interracial rape in Forrest County, and juries across the state had only achieved

³⁸ Elliott Chaze, "Rape Charge Filed Against White Youth," *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Cannon Indicted," *Hattiesburg American*, July 17, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Conflicting Stories Told," *Hattiesburg American*, November 10, 1965; Mississippi Bureau of Identification Case Report, Forrest County, July 15, 1965, re: Rape of Rosa Lee Coates, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers, [hereinafter cited as Coates Rape, MBIC Report]; *State of Mississippi v. Norman Cannon* (1965) case no. 142/6467, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 55, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi [hereafter cited as *Mississippi v. Norman Cannon* (1965), docket].

such convictions a dozen times. In the smattering of convictions, the victim was usually a child. Still, some things had changed in Forrest County, and this teenage victim elicited empathy among the white patriarchs and white citizenry. Surely it helped that the Coates family was not involved in the Movement, and the trial never became a civil rights case. Cannon had no powerful friends among the white elite or the Klan. Moreover, Dukes considered rape a despicable crime, and likely his zeal to convict Cannon influenced the jury to place justice over race.³⁹

Dukes and Finch presented a strong case against Cannon. On the witness stand, the victim's grandmother, Lillie Beal, and a friend, Mary Louise Wade, testified that they had witnessed Cannon transport Coates out of the neighborhood. When asked to identify Cannon, Beal moved out of her chair on the witness stand and crossed the room to the defendant table, pointed at Cannon and said, "that's him." Lawrence Arrington, who later became a famous Klan lawyer, and Arlington Jones, defended Cannon. On the stand, Cannon claimed that he had met Coates prior to the day of the alleged rape, that she had informed him that she enjoyed dating white men, and on July 13 she willingly had sexual intercourse with him. When Coates took the stand, she testified that she had never met Cannon until the day he arrived at her home. She informed the court of her rape, identified Cannon as her rapist, and described his knife and his vehicle in precise detail.⁴⁰

³⁹ Elliott Chaze, "Rape Charge Filed Against White Youth," *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Cannon Indicted," *Hattiesburg American*, July 17, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Cannon Found Guilty of Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, November 11, 1965; Coates Rape, MBIC Report, PBJ Papers; *Mississippi v. Norman Cannon* (1965), docket.

⁴⁰ Quoting Elliot Chaze, "Grandmother Points to Cannon," *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 1965. Elliot Chaze, "Conflicting Stories Told," *Hattiesburg American*,

The jurors found Cannon guilty of rape, but they refused to sentence him to death even though rape was a capital offense in Mississippi at the time. Instead, jurors sent him to prison for life. Elliott Chaze boasted that the conviction of Cannon was the first time in Forrest County that a jury had sent a white man to prison for raping a black female. The Cannon case sent the message that not all white men could commit crimes against blacks with guaranteed impunity. Still, the jury's refusal to sentence Cannon to death when that proved the popular sentence for convicted black rapists at the time, revealed that a dual justice system persisted in Mississippi. Moreover, blacks who committed crimes against whites continued to face a hostile justice system that denied them their rights. During the year that Finch and Dukes delivered justice for Coates, they employed all of their power to convict a black man on capital murder charges.⁴¹

The killing occurred on a clear spring night in late March 1965. The attractive, stocky 20-year-old black man, Cloudies Shinall, had no plans to murder anyone, when he set out for a night of bar-hopping in Palmers Crossing with his drinking buddies, James Anderson and Lewis Willie Smith. At Bama Madison's pub, Shinall started playing around with a gun that belonged to one of his friends until someone saw Constables Wilmer Kitchens and Cotton Humphrey approaching the bar. Everyone knew about the beating Shinall had received at the hands of Kitchens that past summer. Madison hid the gun, and Shinall kept his back to the door. After the constables departed, Shinall

November 10, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Cannon Found Guilty of Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, November 11, 1965.

⁴¹ Elliott Chaze, "Cannon Found Guilty of Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, November 11, 1965; *Mississippi v. Norman Cannon* (1965), docket; The Fellowship of the Concerned, Southern Regional Council, "Dual Justice in the Courts—Unconcerned Community," 2-5, 8-11, Cox Collection, Addendum, 1978.

collected the gun and left with his friends. Later that night, Shinall parked in front of the Heat Wave Tavern, but he panicked when he saw Constable Kitchen's vehicle behind them. He said nothing to Anderson or Smith as he desperately tried to re-start the stalled 1954 Chevy. Just as the constable flashed his lights on the Chevy, the engine roared to life. Shinall headed toward Palmers Crossing Road. Although the black men had not committed any crime, the white constable pursued the Chevy. Terrified, Shinall accelerated his speed and curved down dark country roads to escape the constable. Smith and Anderson begged Shinall to stop, and asked, "Why [are you] running [?] We ha[ven't] done anything." Shinall never answered; instead, he maneuvered the vehicle dangerously around corners to outrace the white lawman. He would not allow Kitchens to brutalize him again.⁴²

But Shinall swerved off the pavement onto a gravel road in a residential area and lost control of the Chevy. As he tried to straighten the vehicle, he careened into a yard, and the car came to a halt in the driveway. The constable parked behind the Chevy and shouted for the men to step out of the vehicle. Smith and Anderson complied, but Shinall froze. The constable approached the driver's side, shined his flashlight into the window, aimed his gun at Shinall, and ordered, "Get out you nigger, I ought to kill you." Shinall reached under his seat and pulled out the gun. He aimed at the officer and shot him in the throat. The force of the bullet knocked the gun from the constable's hand. Completely vulnerable at this point, the constable cried for help. Petrified, Smith and Anderson ran

⁴² First and second quote *Mississippi v. Shinall* (1965), transcript, 712, 765 respectively. Ibid., 709-715; 743, 762-766; 829-830. For appearance of Shinall, see photograph and description in Elliott Chaze, "Shinall Given Death Sentence," *Hattiesburg American*, July 23, 1965.

from the scene. As they fled into the darkness, they heard two more shots.⁴³

Later, when police arrived, they found that the dead constable was not Kitchens, but Constable Humphreys, who had driven Kitchens' vehicle that night. Shinall later claimed that he acted in self-defense, that Kitchens had savagely beaten him before and threatened to kill him; and that he thought Kitchens was the man chasing him because he never saw the man's face—only the vehicle, which belonged to Kitchens. Most blacks across Palmers Crossing believed that Shinall had long dreamed of killing Kitchens, not so much because he had beaten him, but because he had forced Shinall's girlfriend into a sexual relationship. Neither Shinall nor any defense witnesses ever mentioned the rape of his girlfriend in any official proceeding. Hours after the murder, Shinall met Anderson at Mary Jones' café where he bragged that after he first shot the constable in the throat, he walked up to him and "shot the son of a bitch again in the head." The killing horrified most whites who considered it a cold-blooded murder. More importantly, they perceived the black man's audacious murder of a white constable the gruesome harvest of the Movement. The fight for black liberation had released the so-called black beast that the white police state had long managed to suppress.⁴⁴

In great contrast to white perspectives, many African Americans, particularly Palmers Crossing residents, were relieved that one of the constables who had terrorized

⁴³ Quoting *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 831. *Ibid.*, 715-722, 767-771, 830-832.

⁴⁴ Quoting *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 727, *Ibid.*, 829-832; 787-814; 726-727. For the rape of Shinall's lover, see Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 148-149. For the general white perception of the homicide of Cotton Humphrey, see "Shinall Hearing Probably Will be Held Next Week, Trial in July," *Hattiesburg American*, March 30, 1965; Elliott Chaze, "Shinall Case Unlikely Demonstration Showcase," *Hattiesburg American*, July 14, 1965.

their community was dead. They perceived the killing as the logical manifestation of the rage of an oppressed people. Both Humphreys and Kitchens had long used their power in the Jim Crow system to emasculate black men by beating them, and Kitchens had raped black women. Shinall's murder of one of them symbolized a reassertion of black masculinity. Even the young children of Palmers Crossing had feared the constables because of stories they heard or because they had witnessed the men harassing their parents. Freedom Summer student Carol Jackson recalled that "we knew about the police. We knew to stay away from them, not to say anything to them. You could not be seen anymore if you said something." The day after the killing, Jackson's father took Carol and her sister Lillie over to the murder scene. They stood and stared at the blood stained street. The Jacksons, like most blacks, would not mourn the constable's passing. Some whites like Sheriff's Deputy Bob McGee would not mourn the loss of Humphreys either. He knew that Humphreys and Kitchens had brutalized the black community and that they targeted Shinall. McGee belonged to a small and silent minority of whites.⁴⁵

Defense attorneys Jack Young and Jess R. Brown hoped to prove that Shinall killed Humphrey in self-defense—a formidable task considering that the courts served as the citadel of the white supremacist system. Young intended to prove that because Constable Humphrey and Constable Kitchens had launched a "reign of terror" against blacks in Palmers Crossing, Shinall feared for his life when Humphreys approached him. To prove that Humphreys and Kitchens habitually assaulted blacks, Brown planned to locate their victims and persuade them to testify. He also aimed to bring Kitchens to the

⁴⁵ Quoting Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording. Sheriff Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, MOHP recording.

stand to question him about his violent patrols with Humphreys and to ask him about the beating he had administered to Shinall. By the time of the preliminary hearings, however, Kitchens and some of Humphreys' victims had vanished. Brown motioned for a continuance. Judge Stanton Hall, who had long shown his prejudice against civil rights activists like Clyde Kennard and Medgar Evers when they appeared in his court, denied the motion.⁴⁶

During change of venue motions, several witnesses testified for the defense that since racism plagued Forrest County and local reporting had inflamed racial passions, Shinall could never receive a fair trial in Hattiesburg. Journalist Elliot Chaze had reported that Shinall admitted to shooting the constable. He also created an impression of Shinall as a cold, dangerous, and physically intimidating man by describing him as "a muscular Negro who looks like a middleweight boxer" and by claiming that he never showed any human emotions, but rather "his face remained blank during arraignment." Chaze further prejudiced the jury pool by pointing out that Shinall and his family had a criminal past. At 16-years-old, Shinall had burglarized a grocery store; his brother was imprisoned on burglary charges; and his father spent four years in Parchman for manslaughter after he killed his mistress. The papers also reported that because the FBI regarded the homicide a murder rather than an act of self-defense, agents aided the police. Although Chaze reported that one civil rights leader hoped the trial would publicize the problems of police misconduct and brutality against blacks, Chaze emphasized that he also admitted that the incident failed to justify murder. Finally, Chaze poisoned the jury pool when he revealed that Shinall's black lawyers had worked on NAACP cases, which linked Shinall to the

⁴⁶ *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 57. *Ibid.*, 55-65.

despised Movement. Even a white city attorney, Frank Montague, admitted during the hearings that local whites expressed antipathy to the “so called civil rights” protests. Prosecutor Jimmy Finch quickly invoked the Cannon rape case to counter charges of white supremacist bias in the area. Judge Hall denied the defense motion.⁴⁷

Judge Hall also denied Shinall his constitutional right to impartial grand and petit juries of his peers even though Young proved that the state systematically excluded black jurors. As of 1960, blacks comprised 25 percent of the Forrest County voting age population; yet only a few blacks had served on Forrest County juries, and none had served on petit juries deciding criminal cases over the past 21 years. The exclusion persisted because jurors were drawn from voting rolls, and registrar Theron Lynd had managed, despite federal rulings against him, to prevent most blacks from registering. Consequently, only three blacks appeared in Shinall’s jury pool, and the prosecution easily removed all of them with peremptory challenges. The court also refused to excuse juror Paul Kinsey for cause despite the fact that he served as a Hattiesburg police officer, knew the deceased, had arrested many civil rights activists, and expressed resentment toward laws requiring racial integration. The defense was forced to use one of its peremptory challenges to remove Kinsey.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ First and second quote, “Shinall Hearing,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 30, 1965; third quote, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 76. *Ibid.*, 74-79, 100-113, 785-860. Elliott Chaze, “Shinall Case Unlikely Demonstration Showcase,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 14, 1965; Elliott Chaze, “Shinall Pleads Innocent,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 29, 1965; *State of Mississippi v. Cloudies Shinall* (1965), case no. 141/6434, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 44, 89, Hattiesburg Circuit Court, Mississippi; Appellant’s Brief, January 17, 1966, 18-28, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965).

The pervasiveness of the white supremacist court system emerged, too, in the language lawyers used during the trial. Throughout the trial, prosecutors and defense attorneys addressed white witnesses with courtesy titles including “mister,” “doctor,” and “sheriff.” Defense attorneys also addressed black witnesses with courtesy titles with few exceptions, but prosecutors either neglected to address the black witnesses by name or referred to them by their first names. Nevertheless, the trial also continued a break in racial etiquette in the courtrooms that had begun during Freedom Days when spectators arranged themselves in integrated sections, and the court made no effort to separate the races.⁴⁹

Most blacks hoped for, but few expected, an acquittal. The prosecution possessed indisputable evidence that Shinall shot Humphrey three times. Shinall’s passengers that night, testified for the state that Shinall refused Humphrey’s orders to exit his vehicle, that Shinall shot Humphreys, and that after they fled the scene they heard two more shots. An eyewitness, 14-year-old Andrew Wilborn, testified that from his window, he saw Humphrey drop his gun after Shinall shot him the first time and stagger toward his house begging for help, but Shinall shot Humphrey two more times. Shinall’s friends testified that he boasted about the murder later that night and convinced a friend, William Leggett,

⁴⁸ Elliot Chaze, “Shinall Murder Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1965; Appellant’s Brief (1965), 3, 11-17, 34-35, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 519-520; Elliott Chaze, “Doctor Testifies,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 21, 1965.

⁴⁹ Elliott Chaze, “Shinall Murder Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1965; Elliott Chaze, “State to Seek Death Penalty for Shinall,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1965. For manner in which attorneys address witnesses, see *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 50, 59, 64, 70, 71, 80, 82, 91, 93, 100, 103, 105, 108, 568, 601, 604, 615, 617, 649, 658, 664, 673, 678, 690, 695, 728, 756, 774, 794, 798, 804, 810, 837-839, 841. For racial etiquette in Mississippi, see Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 23-24.

to hide the gun. Detective Arlon Moulds of the Hattiesburg Police Department and FBI Agent Robert M. Zimmons established that the pistol confiscated from Legget was the murder weapon. Humphrey sustained three bullet wounds—one to the base of the throat, one behind the right ear, and one in the back of his head. The evidence proved that the first shot may have been in self-defense, but the latter two were clearly deliberate.⁵⁰

Still, defense attorneys Young and Brown argued that Shinall acted out of a panicked state of terror and killed Humphrey because he lived in a police state and suffered from a siege mentality after Kitchens brutally beat him. Shinall believed that the constable planned to murder him that night. Young and Brown planned to call several witnesses to the stand who would testify that Humphreys and Kitchens were vicious racists who used their power over Palmers Crossing to terrorize local blacks. Dukes and Finch objected to the witnesses. Judge Hall removed the jury while he determined if their testimony was relevant. Witness after witness took the stand and dared to explain to the judge how Humphreys and Kitchens dragged them out of local cafes and off the streets to beat them, arrest them, transport them to jail, and beat them again. Bama Madison testified that she witnessed Constable Kitchens attack Shinall in June 1964, and Lee Mae Shinall recounted the multiple wounds her son suffered at Kitchens's hands. The testimony was significant because it proved that Shinall lived in a community terrorized by Humphrey and Kitchens and that he had suffered a brutal beating by Kitchens, which could have provided mitigating circumstances, leading to lesser charges. The judge, however, excluded all such testimony.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 568-781, 816-823.

⁵¹ *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 678-693, 695-781, 787-815.

Still, Judge Hall could not prevent Shinall from testifying in his own defense. In the presence of the jury, Shinall claimed that he thought Kitchens was the man who chased him and pulled him over that night because the constable drove Kitchens' vehicle. After Shinall crashed in the yard, he recalled hearing a man's voice shout toward the vehicle, "get out you nigger, I ought to kill you." The constable shined his flashlight into the vehicle, and when Shinall turned around he could only make out a figure approaching his vehicle with his gun aimed toward Shinall. The blinding light prevented him from seeing the face of the constable, and he continued to believe the officer was Kitchens. Since Kitchens had brutally beaten him before, he feared that he might kill him. Shinall reached for the gun and shot toward the man. He claimed that he had no recollection of shooting Humphreys two more times. In closing arguments, Finch called on the jury to make an example out of Shinall—to send a message that Hattiesburg would not tolerate the murder of law enforcement officers. After 59 minutes of deliberation, the all-white jury found Shinall guilty and sentenced him to death. Judge Hall scheduled Shinall's execution for September 2, 1965—less than two months away. Blacks in the courtroom cried out with despair and anger.⁵²

Shinall's attorneys appealed the verdict to the Mississippi Supreme Court on the grounds that the circuit court had made several errors. The court systematically excluded black jurors from grand and petit juries and failed to grant a change of venue, even though Forrest County suffered from intense racial prejudice, which poisoned the jury pool against Shinall. Finally, Judge Hall denied Shinall the right to present witness testimony that was imperative to his self-defense plea when he excluded testimony that

⁵² Quoting *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), transcript, 831. *Ibid.*, 825-860, 863; Elliott Chaze, "Shinall Given Death Sentence," *Hattiesburg American*, July 23, 1965.

proved that Constables Humphrey and Kitchens had terrorized the black community in Palmers Crossing. Young argued that the courts had established extensive precedents allowing the defendant the right to present evidence to the jury, which showed his perspective of potential danger considering the circumstances surrounding the killing, his perception of the person killed based on previous encounters, and the character of the deceased so that the court could determine the actual aggressor in the struggle. Although the Mississippi Supreme Court declared that the jury delivered a sound verdict based on thorough evidence, the justices agreed that Forrest County had systematically excluded black jurors. They returned the case to the circuit court.⁵³

⁵³ Appellant's Brief, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), 2-3, 11-28, 31, 40-43. Young cites a series of case law, beginning with *Strauder v. West Virginia* which prohibited the exclusion of black jurors when the defendant was a member of the black race. The courts ruled that the law applied to grand and petit juries in both *Neal v. Delaware* and *Martin v. Texas*. In *Brown v. Mississippi* and *Smith v. Texas* the courts ruled that persistent absence of, or mere tokenism of blacks, or other defined minority groups also constituted systematic exclusion. Young concluded with *Patton v. Mississippi*, *Avery v. Georgia*, and *United States ex rel Goldsby v. Harpole*, in which the courts decided that verdicts and criminal indictments issued by jury panels, in which racial discrimination occurred during jury selection, must be remanded. Young included the following case law in his arguments regarding change of venue: *Seale v. Mississippi*, *Magness v. Mississippi*, *Gaddis v. Mississippi*, and *Keeton v. Mississippi*, all of which ruled that defendants had a right to be tried in an environment free of prejudice and in a community where the jurors did not fear facing condemnation from that community if they acquitted the defendant. For the self-defense argument, Young cites *Bell v. Mississippi*, *Scott v. Mississippi*, *Dyson v. Mississippi*, *Evans v. Mississippi*, *Bang v. Mississippi*, which all established that persons had a right to kill in self-defense when they believed themselves in danger of great injury. *Evans v. Mississippi* and *Hood v. Mississippi* further specified that a person could kill in self defense when they perceived themselves in danger because of a gesture by an assailant, even if afterward actual danger did not occur. *Anderson v. Mississippi* ruled that the character of the deceased becomes important if the court was trying to determine the actual aggressor in the struggle and *Rucker v. Mississippi* declared that a jury must understand the mental state of the accused during the killing, and the court must permit the defendant to explain any previous circumstances which influenced the defendant's state of mind. For Mississippi Supreme Court decision, see, *Cloudies Shinall v. State of Mississippi*, June 13, 1966, No. 43866, 187 So. 2d 840; 1966 Miss. LEXIS 1359.

Forrest County retried Shinall the following summer. During the voir dire examination, the state once again managed to empanel an all-white jury, this time by using five of its challenges to remove black jurors. Brown accused the state of unlawfully removing the jurors based on race and motioned for the judge to “quash” the jury panel, but Judge Stanton Hall overruled his objection. In an effort to seat an impartial white jury, Brown tried to root out racist jurors by questioning them about their memberships in various organizations, such as the Citizens Council and eliciting their views on segregation. When Brown inquired of potential juror William K. Scarborough, a professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, his views on school desegregation Scarborough admitted that he “had feelings regarding it, but I don’t think that’s in issue in this case.” The prosecution objected, and Judge Hall prevented the defense from persisting in that line of questioning. Unbeknownst to Brown, Scarborough was a self-described “die hard segregationist,” who joined the Citizens Council while living in Jackson and retained his membership when he moved to Hattiesburg. Brown never asked Scarborough if he belonged to any white supremacist organizations. Perhaps he considered a professor who was educated at Cornell and the University of North Carolina as more liberal on the race question.⁵⁴

Once the trial began, the state again prohibited Shinall’s attorneys from making a case for self-defense when Judge Hall refused to permit black residents from testifying in front of the jury about the brutality that they had suffered at the hands of Humphrey and

⁵⁴ First quote, *State of Mississippi v. Cloudies Shinall* (July 1966), case no. 6570, transcript, 491, in Mississippi Supreme Court record (January 17, 1967), case no. 44,352, MDAH [hereinafter cited as *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1966) transcript]; second quote, *Ibid.*, 509; *Ibid.*, 3, 438-444, 504-512; third quote, William K. Scarborough, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 25, 2007, MOHP recording.

Kitchens. Judge Hall also refused to hear testimony from witnesses who could show that Humphreys was likely intoxicated on the night of his death as they had witnessed him drinking alcohol at several bars. The defense elicited the most important testimony for their case while Brown cross-examined Sheriff Gray, as the white jury was more likely to trust the word of a white lawman than black witnesses. Gray testified that Humphreys was elected as constable for beat four, but he regularly patrolled beat three with Kitchens. Gray conceded that Humphrey could not lawfully patrol that beat alone and arrest persons in that beat. When the defense inquired about charges of police brutality against Humphreys, the prosecutors objected, and Judge Hall excused the jury. Outside the presence of the jury, Gray admitted that he had received several complaints and that he had requested the dismissal of Kitchens. After Humphrey's death, authorities investigated some of the complaints and forced Kitchens to resign. Citing the *Eaton* and *Bell* cases, Brown argued that the judge must admit this testimony because as human behavior stemmed from past experiences, the defense had the right to present a full picture of the context in which the killing occurred. The court ruled that such testimony was hearsay and sustained the prosecution's objections.⁵⁵

During jury deliberations, the jurors never once discussed the issue of race and as Scarborough later noted, they took no pleasure in possibly sending Shinall to his death despite the fact that "it was a black man who killed a white deputy." On August 6, the jury found Shinall guilty of murder, and sentenced him to death. In August 1971, after many failed appeals, the case was returned again to Forrest County courts when a U. S.

⁵⁵ Several witnesses testified outside the presence of the jury. For testimony regarding police misconduct and police brutality, see *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1966), transcript, 1180-1319; *Ibid.*, 766-769, 773-774, 796-806; 1180-1188, 1306-1319.

Supreme Court decision found courts could not exclude jurors simply because they opposed the death penalty. The case finally concluded on August 6, 1971, when Shinall changed his plea to guilty, and the court sentenced him to jail for life. After many years in prison, Mississippi granted Shinall parole under the terms that he never return to the state. He spent the remainder of his life in Indiana under the custody of his sister where he died in 2003.⁵⁶

The Shinall case reflected the complex battles wracking the Central Piney Woods in the mid-sixties. Even though Shinall likely shot Humphrey the first time in self-defense, he chose to exit his vehicle and pursue the unarmed and wounded constable. As the constable tried to escape, Shinall shot him in the side of his head and then the back of his head, which was inconsistent with self-defense. Still, the judge refused to allow the jury to hear evidence of the mitigating circumstances such as the psychological terror that Kitchens and Humphrey had created in Palmers Crossing residents. The court also failed to consider that Shinall had tried to escape the constable, and Humphrey approached him with a gun and threatened to kill him. Humphrey's aggressive actions precipitated Shinall's aggressive reaction. Some blacks believed that these circumstances proved that Shinall's crime was manslaughter rather than first degree murder. Some blacks viewed

⁵⁶ Quoting William K. Scarborough, interview. For the verdict, sentence and the first appeal, see, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1966), transcript, 1356-1363. For systematic exclusion of black jurors, see *Ibid.*, 492. For the many other appeals, see, *Cloudies Shinall v. State of Mississippi*, May 15, 1967, No. 44352, 199 So. 2d 251; 1967 Miss. LEXIS 1290; *Shinall v. Mississippi*, Supreme Court of the United States, December 18, 1967, 389 U. S. 1014, S. Ct. 590; 18 L. Ed. 2d 660; 1967 U.S. LEXIS 27; *Cloudies Shinall v. State of Mississippi*, January 29, 1968, No. 44352, 206 So. 2d 332; 1968 Miss. LEXIS 1567; *Cloudies Shinall v. C. E. Breazeale, Superintendent of Mississippi State Penitentiary*, December 19, 1968, United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 404 F. 2d 785; 1968 U. S. App. LEXIS 4422. For the final sentence of Shinall, see, "Shinall Changes Plea to Guilty; Sentenced to Life," *Hattiesburg American*, August 6, 1971. For the release of Shinall, see Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 149.

Shinall's actions as a spontaneous revolt against oppression. In California, the Black Panthers organized black rage against the racist white system into a movement against racial injustice that eventually spiraled into a violent war between police and the Black Panthers. Shinall acted alone, but likely out of the same rage against injustice and black emasculation. For over a century in the Central Piney Woods, white men had used the police state to control blacks. They harassed, unlawfully arrested, falsely convicted, beat, raped, and killed them with impunity. Humphrey and Kitchens brutally mistreated blacks and inculcated in Shinall a violent rage toward them. Humphrey was ultimately a victim, but he was never an innocent.⁵⁷

Even after the Shinall case, unequal justice remained a grave problem in Mississippi. In 1965, the Civil Rights Commission as well as the Fellowship of the Concerned Southern Regional Council perceived racial injustice as one of the most powerful forces of racial oppression in Mississippi. Blacks correctly perceived law enforcement officials, judges, and prosecutors as oppressors rather than "protectors." When accused of a crime, blacks faced an "all-white justice" system that remained hostile toward them. Some southern cities had hired black police officers, but their numbers remained miniscule and their duties generally limited to patrolling black communities. Blacks comprised an infinitesimal percentage of court officers in municipal, state, and

⁵⁷ For the Black Panthers and their views on self-defense and black liberation through violence, see Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press: 2006), particularly 87-112, 113-116, 183-184. For the circumstances surrounding the killing and police brutality in Palmers Crossing, see *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1965), case no. 43,866, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1966), transcript; Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009. For the defense lawyers arguments, see Appellant's Brief, *Shinall v. Mississippi* (1966). For provocation defenses, see *Ex Parte Fraley*, Oklahoma Criminal Court of Appeals, 109 P. 295 (1910).

federal courts. The southern federal legal system failed to employ or appoint a single black person as a judge, a clerk, a jury commissioner, or a marshal. Southern courts also perpetually excluded black jurors, which denied blacks their right to a “jury of [their] peers.” African Americans charged with crimes faced a prejudicial system in which white police could beat them with impunity, biased magistrates generally denied them bond and tried them in segregated courts, and white male jurors determined their fate. Not surprisingly, inequity also persisted in sentencing. Although whites comprised over half of the South’s convicted rapists, between 1930 and 1967 blacks received the death penalty for that crime at a much higher rate. Eighty-seven percent of persons executed for rape were black.⁵⁸

Not only did the justice system remain basically void of a black voice, President Johnson nominated former Mississippi Governor James P. Coleman, a segregationist, to the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal in the summer of 1965. Outraged, 32 organizations including SNCC, SCLC, MFDP, and CORE signed a statement condemning the nomination. Victoria Gray, like many activists, considered Coleman the architect of massive resistance. As governor, Coleman had proposed and/or signed into law legislation and issued executive orders that recognized racial segregation in schools, required segregation of waiting rooms in transportation facilities, and allowed the state attorney general to investigate subversive organizations. Coleman formed the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and supported it with state funds. In direct violation of the United States Constitution supremacy clause, he signed Mississippi’s interposition law,

⁵⁸ First quote, Civil Rights Commission, *A Report on Equal Protection in the South*, 182. Ibid., 183-188; all other quotes, The Fellowship of the Concerned, Southern Regional Council, “Dual Justice in the Courts—Unconcerned Community,” 4-5; Ibid., 2-3, 8-11, Cox Collection, Addendum, 1978.

which allowed the state to determine if it should comply with the *Brown* decision. He had convinced the white public to give him the power to close schools if forced to integrate and had used the threat of that power to prevent Clyde Kennard from gaining admission to the University of Southern Mississippi. Finally, Coleman publicly advocated black disfranchisement. President Johnson nominated him to the very court that decided cases regarding discrimination. Yet Coleman had powerful supporters in the federal government, including the FBI and even Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, who had often been an ally of civil rights activists. In July 1965, despite massive black protest, the U. S. Congress affirmed Coleman.⁵⁹

Still, blacks held out hope that President Johnson's Voting Rights Act would pass the U. S. Congress that summer and provide them access to the vote that they needed to change the political landscape. The act prohibited states from using voter qualifications designed to disfranchise persons based on their race or color and prevented states from using literacy exams to qualify voters. The bill also allowed congress to send federal registrars into states with low voter turnout. White Mississippi, led by Governor Johnson, bitterly opposed the act. On August 5, at the Neshoba County Fair, Johnson launched into a tirade against the Voting Rights Bill. To dilute the black vote, he called for the 400,000 unregistered eligible white voters to register immediately. The day after Johnson's speech, the president signed the Voting Rights Act into law. Soon after the act's passage, the NAACP received 67 complaints of voter discrimination in Laurel and requested that

⁵⁹ Statement Opposing Confirmation of Governor J. P. Coleman, n. d. from Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Ser. 16, Reel 41; Statement of Victoria Gray on Behalf of the Executive Committee, MFDP, June 29, 1965; "James P. Coleman, Profile of a Man in the News," *Southern Reporting Service*, Bills Signed Into Law by Governor Coleman, all in Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers. Parker, *Black Votes Count*, 82-85.

the federal government send registrars to the area. Within a week of receiving the NAACP complaint, federal registrars took over. Within a few days, they had registered 325 people. The *Hattiesburg American* complained about their presence and accused Washington D. C. of imposing a Second Reconstruction on the South.⁶⁰

A month after the bill's passage, the MFDP Congressional Challenge came before the House of Representatives. The MFDP presented the wealth of evidence it had collected over the year, which proved that past voter discriminations had led to the illegal election of the current U. S. congressmen from Mississippi. Victoria Gray testified that she tried to run for congress in the Fifth District and managed to acquire the necessary number of signatures to become a lawful candidate, but Lynd only certified 12 of the 68 names, contending the others had not paid their poll taxes. Gray noted that the Twenty-Fourth Amendment prohibited states from charging poll taxes as a requirement for political participation in federal elections, but Lynd responded that he was following Mississippi rather than federal law. Colmer denied that Mississippi officials had engaged in voter discrimination and labeled the challenge a conspiracy. He warned that should the conspiracy succeed, it would undermine the stability of the House of Representatives and result in a series of challenges by groups that he considered equally threatening including the Klan and Black Muslims. Although Mississippi lacked a powerful Black Muslim

⁶⁰ John Perdew, "How The Civil Rights Bill Is Being Subverted In Mississippi," August 4, 1965, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers; Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr. Address at Neshoba County Fair, August 5, 1965, Ser. II, Subser. 4, PBJ Papers; Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-352; 78 Stat. 241), United States Congress, in *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November 1984, 54-71, Ser. 43, Stennis Collection; "NAACP Requests Registrar Here: No Action Taken Yet," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 12, 1965; "Registrars Here Put 166 On Rolls," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 23, 1965; "Cloudy Picture," *Hattiesburg American*, August 11, 1965; "Vote Tuesday for Amendments," *Hattiesburg American*, August 14, 1965, 2; "Amendment Wins by a Landslide," *Hattiesburg American*, August 18, 1965.

group, by invoking them and comparing them to the Klan, Colmer tried to link all challengers of the status quo as dangerous radicals. As he hoped, his harangue incited white paranoia and drove many congress members to choose the Regular Democrats whom they knew over the black challengers whom were unfamiliar to them.⁶¹

On September 15, the House of Representatives dismissed the MFDP Challenge on the grounds that the candidates ran in the election without “legal basis,” and the votes they claimed to have acquired “were not sufficient to change the outcome of the election.” Moreover, they noted that the Voting Rights Act would provide a medium for protection against future discrimination. Of course, the latest civil rights act failed to guarantee an end to voter discrimination in the state. Initially, the Department of Justice only sent federal registrars to a few counties. The persistent discrimination, particularly in counties lacking federal registrars, enraged activists, who flooded the Department of Justice with complaints. In response, the federal government increasingly dispatched watchdogs to monitor elections. Still, intimidation and violence kept many blacks from the registration office and the polls.⁶²

In 1965, the Movement achieved some victories, but the trudge toward the proverbial “mountain top” remained an arduous one. The federal government still had refused to become the faithful ally of civil rights. Despite the passage of civil rights

⁶¹ “Contested Elections in the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth Districts of the State of Mississippi,” Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration House of Representatives, Eighty-Ninth Congress, First Session, September 13 and 14, 1965, 33, 49-51, Election Contest, Abernathy Collection.

⁶² Quoting “Dismissing the Five Mississippi Election Contests,” H. R. Report No. 1008, 89th Congress, 1st Session, September 15, 1965, 4, Mississippi Election Contest, 1965-1966, Abernathy Collection. *Ibid.*, 1-3, 5-6; Neil R. McMillen, “Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 43 (Aug., 1977): 369-372.

legislation and the FBI investigations of Klan violence, all levels of the federal government still conceded to some demands by white supremacists and routinely neglected to enforce the laws it had passed. The federal government supported black enfranchisement, but it also ensured that whites retained control over the state when the U. S. Congress rejected the MFDP challenge. Moreover, as of the fall of 1965, Washington had only lightly intervened to enforce the Voting Rights Act, and President Johnson had appointed a segregationist as a federal judge to oversee cases that included voting rights and desegregation. The Department of Justice and the courts had failed to use their enforcement powers to ensure southern compliance with school desegregation. The federal government had yet to use legislation in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to file lawsuits against segregated school districts. The failure of federal leaders to mobilize all of their power to enforce compliance with federal laws sent the message that its support of civil rights goals remained tenuous which in turn encouraged white noncompliance. Many white supremacists determined that their war of attrition would work as it had during Reconstruction. Resistance, they believed, would produce stagnation, regression, and ultimately the federal government would once again abandon the black South.⁶³

⁶³ “Dismissing the Five Mississippi Election Contests,” H. R. Report No. 1008, 89th Congress, 1st Session, September 15, 1965, 1-6, Mississippi Election Contest, 1965-1966, Abernathy Collection; McMillen, “Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s,” 369-372. For the battle over the Coleman nomination, see “James P. Coleman, Profile of a Man in the News,” *Southern Reporting Service*, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers; Freedom Registration Vote, September 1, 1964, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers. Carson, *In Struggle*, 125-126; Dittmer, *Local People*, 288. For failures of school desegregation, see John Perdew, “How The Civil Rights Bill Is Being Subverted In Mississippi,” August 4, 1965, Ser. 16, Reel 41, SNCC Papers; Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Still, civil rights activists achieved some successes during these trying times. Many activists capitalized on President Johnson's War on Poverty programs and worked with the Child Development Group of Mississippi program (CDGM) to organize nearly a dozen Head Start programs—free preschools for children. The Head Start centers provided students with preparatory education and many parents with employment opportunities. Each center was staffed with a resource specialist holding a college degree, teachers with high school diplomas, a secretary, a treasurer, and a cook as well as various staff members. The centers also employed local directors, including Helen Anderson in Forrest County and John Mudd in Jones County. Community organizer Maycie Gore drove her CDGM station wagon across Jones and nearby Wayne counties to recruit teachers, staff, and students. Eventually, Gore convinced many churches to open their doors to the centers and persuaded parishioners to send their children to the schools. The centers opened opportunities for blacks to liberate themselves from white bosses. As Gore recalled, black cooks “began to leave out of the white folks’ kitchens” to work for Head Start centers.⁶⁴ While CDGM helped poor blacks receive their benefits and educate their pre-school aged children, the NAACP sought to open higher education to blacks.

The NAACP achieved a significant victory in the fall of 1965 with the desegregation of William Carey College and the University of Southern Mississippi. USM accepted 24-year-old activist Raylawni Branch and recent high school graduate Elaine Armstrong out of the 18 black applicants. Locals considered the desegregation of the university a “miraculous breakthrough.” With the exception of a few incidents, Branch and Armstrong confronted little racism on campus. During her year at USM,

⁶⁴ Quoting Maycie Gore, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording; Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School*, 151-152.

Branch was poor, had three children under the age of seven, and her husband suffered from mental illness. Still, with some material aid from Robert Beech and Vernon Dahmer, she managed to stay in school. COFO established a small base on the USM campus. The Delta Ministry Project, which had assumed the Hattiesburg Minister's Project under its umbrella, developed several significant contacts with professors at USM and William Carey College under Robert Beech's guidance. The NAACP, under J. C. Fairley's leadership, also focused on voter registration and achieved tangible progress. By September 1965, out of the 7,500 eligible black voters 2,500 had registered.⁶⁵

Despite these successes, efforts to advance black economic life and to attack police brutality generally foundered. The National Council of Church's Delta Ministry Project initiated operations to desegregate local industries and organize maids into a union. Although industries started opening once white-only jobs to black employees, the maid union failed because white families used "scabbing" techniques—hiring blacks from the massive pool of the unemployed. Blacks regained new hope in October 1965, when the Hattiesburg Police Department hired four black policemen—Willie Cox McGilvery, Lawrence Floyd, Willie Fluker, and Ernest Joseph. Certainly, the existence of black police officers signaled an opportunity to begin the destruction of the dual justice system in Hattiesburg. However, white authorities ensured that the black police officers lacked the power of their white counterparts. Moreover, the black community later

⁶⁵ Quoting "Robert Beech, "Report and Evaluation, Hattiesburg," Delta Ministry Project, September 1964 - September 1965, Jill Wakeman (Goodman) Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Beech, "Report and Evaluation, Hattiesburg," Wakeman Papers]; Raylawni Branch, interview by Kim Adams, October 25, 1993, MOHP Digital; Hattiesburg COFO—Very Active, February 24, [1965], Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 55.

accused several of these black officers of becoming lackeys for their white superiors who beat blacks as much, if not more, than their white counterparts. Moreover, Klansmen continued to recruit police officers into its ranks. Special Agent in Charge Roy K. Moore informed Governor Johnson that at least two Jones County lawmen, Constables Mack W. Tucker and Gerald Martin, were members of the White Knights.⁶⁶

Klan lawlessness persisted in Forrest and Jones Counties in the late summer and throughout the fall and winter. In September, after receiving orders from Deavours Nix, Pete Martin, Lester Thornton, Frank Lyons, and Charles “Red” Noble carried out a drive-by shooting on the home of Laurel-Jones County NAACP president Benjamin Murph. Afterward, Noble disposed of the guns. It was the second planned hit on Murph that summer. On June 15 the Klan also fired shots into his home. After the second drive-by shooting, Murph’s insurance company canceled his policy, and he could not secure insurance from any other company. After law enforcement investigated the Murph case, prosecutor William O. Dillard charged Pete Martin with whitecapping, which carried a maximum five-year penalty. A Klan informant warned authorities, however, that Jones County Circuit Clerk Leonard Caves was affiliated with the Klan and would protect Klansmen from prosecution. Caves’ duties included selecting grand jurors. On September

⁶⁶ Quoting Beech, “Report and Evaluation, Hattiesburg,” Wakeman Papers “4 Negro Policemen,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 1, 1965. In 1972, black policemen sued the city for discrimination, see *Alvin Eaton et al. v. The City of Hattiesburg*, Hugh Herring, *Civil Service Commission of the City of Hattiesburg*, Paul Grady, *Hattiesburg City Council* (filed May 17, 1972), civil action no. 724-30, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, USM. For charges of police brutality, see Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, tape-recording, MOHP. Roy K. Moore to Honorable Paul B. Johnson, September 23, 1965, and attachment, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers.

16, the grand jury refused to indict Martin.⁶⁷

Klansmen continued to attack blacks with seeming impunity that fall. On October 11, several Klansmen shot into Brewell Curie's home and set it on fire. Curie's wife and four children managed to save some furniture and remove it from the home before the fire engulfed the entire house. As his family escaped the inferno, Curie shot at the attackers and hit the vehicle occupied by several Klansmen. The Klansmen rushed to Lawrence Byrd's farm and woke him. Klansman Billy Roy Pitts angrily reported "a nigger shot at me with a rifle" and showed him the bullet hole in the hood of his vehicle. Law enforcement, in conjunction with the FBI, investigated the Curie attack immediately but failed to acquire any leads in the case. Still, blacks complained that agents acted like spectators rather than investigators with their notebooks and passivity in the face of violence.⁶⁸

Finally, in the late fall of 1965, federal authorities intensified their investigations of the Klan. In October and November, HUAC subpoenaed several Mississippi Klansmen, including Sam Bowers and Deavours Nix. Simultaneously, the FBI fought a subterranean battle unseen by blacks and whites—the infiltration of the Invisible Empire by agents and informants. Roy Moore, the Special Agent in Charge of Mississippi,

⁶⁷ FBI Report, February 19, 1966, attached to John Wallace Wertz to SAC, Jackson, February 23, 1966, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #44-1512-4; FBI Report, December 17, 1965, Melvin Pete Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-1, FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-60, all in Helfrich Papers. "Home of NAACP Branch Leader Again Blasted," NAACP News Release, September 25, 1965, Pt. 20, Reel 1, NAACP Papers; "Dr. Murph Home Hit By Gunfire," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 15, 1965.

⁶⁸ Quoting FBI Report, February 17, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-107, Helfrich Papers; "Shot Routs Family Before Home Burns," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 11, 1965; Nicholas Von Hoffman, "FBI Digs Into Klan Secrets In Grim Mississippi Struggle," *Commercial Appeal*, September 14, 1964, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers.

calculated that through the execution of COINTELPRO agents recruited approximately one informant for every 100 Klansmen interviewed. Agents also found some powerful allies among the elite in the Central Piney Woods. Some of these Mississippians had either always opposed or turned against the White Knights that fall as they had grown tired of the negative impact of Klan violence on the state. Agent Robert Lee found an ally in county attorney Charles Pickering, a native of Jones County. Although Pickering had helped defend the Regular Democrats during the MFDP challenge, he opposed racial violence, and he had begun to question the Jim Crow system. In late 1965, Pickering decided to take a bold stand against the Klan, when Agent Lee provided him with a list of 130 crimes committed by the White Knights. Pickering authored a statement “condemning [Klan] violence” and along with the District Attorney Chet Dillard brought it to Mayor Henry Bucklew.⁶⁹

Mayor Bucklew was an unlikely and hesitant crusader against the Klan. He had directed George Wallace’s 1964 presidential campaign in three southern cities, served as a member of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission’s speaker’s bureau, and run for governor on a racist platform. The Klan, however, proved bad for business, and mayors relied on a good economy to sustain their political clout. Three major businesses revoked plans to establish bases in the Central Piney Woods after the wave of Klan violence. The Klan also hampered the administration of law. Many Jones Countians so

⁶⁹ Quoting Charles Pickering, interview, 794. *Ibid.*, 785, 787, 790-791, 794-796; Donald A. Schlaefter to SAC, Jackson, October 26, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-232, Helfrich Papers. “Probe Calls Sam Bowers: Records Ordered,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 26, 1965; “Nix Receives Probe Paper,” *Laurel Leader Call*, November 20, 1965, both in Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-37, Helfrich Papers. Nicholas Von Hoffman, “FBI Digs into Klan Secrets in Grim Mississippi Struggle,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 14, 1964; Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan’s Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 91.

feared the White Knights that they refused to serve on juries charged with rendering judgment against Klansmen, which troubled the mayor. As he liked to say: "I'm a segregationist, but I'm not a criminal." Bucklew viewed the South's war against the federal government as a futile cause that would only result in defeat. He later told the public: "We must adjust to the things that are inevitable. We don't have to like it. We just have to do it." Pickering was a much greater force for change as he steadily moved from a moderate on the racial issue to a progressive. Although Pickering viewed the struggle as a moral imperative, he used the economic crisis to convince Mayor Bucklew that the time had come to reassert control over his city. In October, the *Laurel Leader-Call* printed a photograph of Mayor Bucklew, the chief of police, the sheriff, and prosecuting attorneys signing an official statement denouncing the White Knights and listing the victims, dates, and locations of each act of Klan terror. The newspaper editors along with many elites in town praised Bucklew's stand.⁷⁰

On October 18, Bucklew took his condemnation of the Klan a step further when he aggressively attacked the White Knights on WDAM-TV, which broadcast the speech live throughout most of southeastern Mississippi. Still, he used a classical and practical moderate segregationist approach: he compared the Klansmen to another despised group—civil rights activists. Bucklew contended that he feared "the flood of scum, degenerates, free-lovers, night riders, church burners, home bombers and hooded thugs running loose." Bucklew made it clear that he opposed racial violence as much as he opposed racial liberalism, for both attracted federal interventionism.

⁷⁰ Quoting Arlie Schardt, "A Mississippi Mayor Fights the Klan," *The Reporter*, January 27, 1966, 39-40, clipping in Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers. "Terror Groups Warned," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 15, 1965, "Officials Serve Notice on Clandestine Group," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 1965; Charles Pickering, interview, 794-798.

You ninety-nine out of one hundred who do not believe in bombing, shooting into homes, calling and threatening life and property . . . I now will speak in my voice for you who prefer to remain silent. . . . This is my state and your state. I'm ashamed . . . aren't you? . . . we did not take part. We shudder . . . we blush . . . we deny, when possible! We even excuse or try to justify these acts. . . . We no longer laugh because some of our citizens want to be judge, jury, and executioner as they try, in secret places in the dark of night, to decide which laws they will obey and which laws they will break. You . . . or your family . . . or mine might well be their next target. . . . many of these fanatics talk so much about God. Can you imagine a loving, merciful, forgiving God blessing the act of any creep who would burn a home or a house of worship? . . . those who create such acts of violence are not only Godless . . . they are traitors! . . . These mob fiends who are infecting our city and state are actually demanding that the Federal government move in and take over every phase of our existence.⁷¹

Bucklew displayed photographs of burned homes and bombed vehicles and offered \$1,000 of his own money for information leading to the successful arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators. Moments after he concluded his speech, numerous phone calls flooded the station as residents offered their moral and financial support. The following day, Mayor Bucklew circulated a petition requesting that people pledge to reject the Klan and agree to serve on juries. One thousand Jones County citizens, as well as ministers, bank executives, business leaders, and official representatives from the Masonite Corporation, signed the petitions. Forty-six churches of the Jones County Baptist Association and the Laurel Kiwanis Club passed resolutions giving their full support to the mayor's fight against the Klan. Mayor Bucklew's office received letters and telegrams from people responding on a 15 to 1 ratio in favor of his stance against the Klan.⁷²

⁷¹ Quoting "Laurel Mayor Asks People to Unite Against Terrorism," *Hattiesburg American*, October 19, 1965; Schardt, "A Mississippi Mayor Fights the Klan," 39-40.

⁷² "Laurel Mayor Asks People to Unite Against Terrorism," *Hattiesburg American*, October 19, 1965; Schardt, "A Mississippi Mayor Fights the Klan," 39-40; "Klan Info Reward Grows," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 19, 1965; "46 Churches

Still, the Klan remained a powerful and dangerous entity, and far too many people in the Central Piney Woods supported the hooded order, which necessitated that the Laurel police guard Bucklew's home every night during his tenure as mayor. Some Laurel citizens publicly criticized Bucklew's stance. State representative and Klan attorney Charles Blackwell argued that Bucklew's speech might frighten away industry by giving big business leaders the false impression that Laurel suffered from lawlessness. Klansmen demanded equal time on WDAM-TV to respond to the mayor's campaign, which they used to claim that they had never engaged in violence. The White Citizens' Council released a statement declaring that "the local officials . . . have made a very serious mistake in that they have attacked a symptom – and not the disease . . . violence is but a symptom[.] If Jones County were free of the NAACP, COFO, CORE, and Freedom Democrat agitators, our problem would be solved." Thousands of whites evinced their support for the White Knights' rival Klan group, the United Klans of America when they flocked to see United Klan Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton speak on October 28 in Forrest County. When asked about Mayor Bucklew's actions against the Klan, Shelton called it a political move. Students from USM flocked to the rally and led the crowd in refrains of "Dixie."⁷³

Ultimately, the local and federal attacks failed to deter Klan violence. As one

Support Law," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 1965; "Kiwanis Back Laurel Petitions," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 28, 1965; "Citizens Respond," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 25, 1965.

⁷³ Quoting "Citizen Council Attacks," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 22, 1965. "Over-Ride Negro Influence, Political Revolution: Klan's Goal—Shelton," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 29, 1965; Schardt, "A Mississippi Mayor Fights the Klan," 39-40; "Johnson Pledges Bucklew Support," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 30, 1965; "Imperial Wizard Denounces LBJ and Reds at Klan Rally," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 29, 1965.

Klansman noted, FBI harassment only caused Sam Bowers to intensify his activities. The Imperial Wizard, as one Klansman recalled, “wanted to show the government that these Northern people, these white communist agitators wasn’t gonna put him down.” Bowers boldly planned violence against city leaders and citizens who had signed the pledge against the Klan. After Bucklew printed the first 500 signatures in the newspaper, Klansmen harassed many of the signatories. Klan leaders also ordered local klaverns to abduct and whip Charles Pickering. When FBI Agent Robert Lee learned of the order, he warned Pickering who took proper precautions. A friend of Pickering’s, who had secretly infiltrated the Klan, also protected him by warning about possible attacks and watching over his house.⁷⁴ Despite the stand against the White Knights, the Invisible Empire sustained its chokehold over the Central Piney Woods, in part, because many members of the white establishment remained more committed to sustaining white supremacy than to law and order.

At the close of 1965, the NAACP and the Civil Rights Commission perceived racial violence and racial injustice as Mississippi’s crucial problem. NAACP Southern Regional Director Ruby Hurley declared that despite federal intervention, Ku Klux Klan violence, police brutality, and false arrests persisted in Mississippi. The Civil Rights Commission, in its report to President Johnson and the U. S. Congress on November 4, 1965, cited racial violence as the most powerful systematic method to sustain the racial caste system in Mississippi and argued that it flowed from the core racism of the sheriffs, police chiefs, and prosecutors who in failing to diligently denounce, investigate, and prosecute racial crimes produced an environment conducive to persistent white

⁷⁴ Quoting “Killed by the Klan”; Charles Pickering, interview, 795; Schardt, “A Mississippi Mayor Fights the Klan,” 39-40.

supremacist violence. Commissioners suggested that congress increase the punishment for violations of civil rights and that the federal government use the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to prosecute persons who perpetrated racial violence when states failed to punish them. They also requested that the congress make municipal, county, and state governments liable for police neglect and brutality. Finally, they recommended that President Johnson provide federal officers with the powers to arrest persons violating federal laws. Although Klan activity slowed in November and December, Klansmen grew quiet not because they feared public opposition or the federal government, but rather because they were watching activists who sought to reinvigorate the Hattiesburg Movement and were planning their violent response.⁷⁵

Vernon Dahmer, along with stalwart NAACP leaders like Clyde Kennard, Hammond Smith, Alice Burns, and Reverend John Barnes had birthed the racial struggle in Hattiesburg in the 1940s, and Dahmer had fueled its growth by bringing COFO and SNCC to Forrest County. Since the Movement exploded across the Hub City in 1964, Dahmer had remained a constant presence, though he moved into the background to protect his family. He was one of the most beloved members in the black community because of his courage and his generosity. His children adored him, but so too did the community kids and perhaps none more than 10-year-old Kerry Fielder, a close friend of Dahmer's son Dennis. Although Kerry adored his own parents deeply, his father Ben Fielder had to work three jobs and his mother Mable worked as a domestic to make ends meet, leaving them with few hours in a day to spend with their son. As a small child,

⁷⁵ Ruby Hurley, "1965 NAACP Annual Report Southeast Region," Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 16, NAACP Papers; Civil Rights Commission, *A Report on Equal Protection in the South*, 97-98, 172-173, 177-187; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, Helfrich Papers.

Kerry began the daily ritual of waking before dawn and racing the mile and a half to the Dahmer farm where he ate breakfast with the family and helped till the land. Dahmer built a special seat on his tractor for Kerry so he could accompany him during his farming. On Saturdays, Dahmer taught Kerry and his children how to fish, swim, and play football and basketball. Dahmer also taught them many lessons about political awareness as he listened to the news every night.⁷⁶

To Kerry, Dahmer was a father figure and a hero—a tangible hero. He later recalled: “Martin Luther King was great and stuff. . . . I had read about Martin Luther King, but [Dahmer] was a man from the community.” Dahmer was a man who gave generously to people, always anonymously, by leaving food on people’s porches. Dahmer was in many ways a product of the tightly-knit community where neighbors helped those in need when they could and adults considered themselves the protectors and nurturers of every child. But to Kerry, Vernon Dahmer was particularly special. Kerry never forgot the lessons he learned at Dahmer’s side. While fishing, riding the tractor, working in the fields, or sitting down for a talk, Dahmer taught Kerry what it meant to be a good worker, a good provider, a good father, a good husband, and a good man. As Fielder noted, “Everybody loved Mr. Dahmer. He was special.” Dahmer occasionally talked to the boys about their rights and about the importance of voting. But he did not share with them the increasing risks he was taking as he began to involve himself more deeply in the Civil Rights Movement.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ben and Mabel Fielder, interview by Neil R. McMillen, January 29, 1994, vol. 483, 27, MOHP; Kerry Fielder, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 4, 2001, MOHP recording.

⁷⁷ Kerry Fielder, interview.

Vernon Dahmer reemerged that fall of 1965 as an important local leader.

Activism had slowed during the fall, but many locals fought to keep the struggle alive by attending meetings and seeking to devise new strategies. On October 8, 1965, Dahmer attended the State NAACP meeting in Jackson at which members developed a strategy to increase voter registration. On November 3, Dahmer attended a meeting held at St. Paul Methodist Church in Hattiesburg at which activists launched the Forrest County's winter voter registration drive. In Hattiesburg, on December 19, delegates from SNCC, SCLC, the MFDP, the HCIA, the NAACP, the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, the Delta Ministry, and a representative from a local poverty program met and devised a strategy to increase voter registration by making it easier for people to pay their poll taxes, which was still a requirement for voting in state elections. Dahmer volunteered to collect poll taxes at his store. He met with the Sheriff Bud Gray and Jimmy Dukes, and they agreed to give him a poll tax book. Both men admired Dahmer and considered him different than the activists on the picket line who they considered more radical. It appears they did not know that he had brought COFO and SNCC to Hattiesburg. Dahmer also planned to launch a canvassing campaign to persuade blacks to pay their poll taxes and vote.⁷⁸

The renewed voter registration campaign infuriated Bowers, who had ordered his White Knights to watch and harass Dahmer for years. The White Knights held two meetings, one in October and the other in December 1965, to discuss specifically the

⁷⁸ FBI Report, March 21, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 30, #44-1512-2579; FBI Report, March 23, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 30, #44-1512-2576; FBI Report, January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, # 44-1512-188; FBI Report, January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8 # 44-1512-189, all in Helfrich Papers. WATS Report, December 19, 1965, Ser. 15, Reel 38, SNCC Papers; James K. Dukes, interview, by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording.

involvement of Dahmer in the voting campaign and to formulate a response. Referring to Dahmer at the December meeting, Bowers stated, “something has to be done about this damn nigger down south.” A Klan informant recalled that Bowers wanted to eliminate Dahmer to put a halt to the black voter registration drive. Another informant argued that Bowers wanted to kill him to raise the image of the Klan prior to testifying in his subpoenaed appearance before HUAC. Over the next few months, several Klansmen executed dry-run attacks on the Dahmer property. At 8:45 on Sunday morning, January 9, 1966, Reverend Milton Barnes announced on his “Gospel Sunrise” radio show: “Here is one for the NAACP. Be wise, be smart, act. Pay your poll tax now, to vote in the city, county, and state elections, you must pay your poll tax. And the deadline is January 31st.” He informed his listeners that they could pay their taxes at several locations and included Dahmer’s store in the list. When the Klan learned about Dahmer’s plan, Bowers ordered his execution.⁷⁹

On January 10, 1966, Ellie and her husband Vernon lay asleep in their bed for the first time in a long while because they believed that the Klan threat had passed. Several miles away, at 2:30 a.m., eight members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan gathered at the Sessum home. They barely spoke to one another, as they drank coffee and worked the actions on their shotguns. Sessum asked the men if anyone wished to leave a

⁷⁹ First quote, *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1998), case no. 6922, vol. 3, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; second quote, FBI Report, January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, # 44-1512-188, Helfrich Papers. Billy Roy Pitts, written confession, n. d., FBI File, #[?]; and Billy Roy Pitts, typed confession, September 30, 1967, FBI File, #44-31694-555, both in Billy Roy Pitts Notebook, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as Pitts, written confession; and Pitts, typed confession]; Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, 71; James H. Downey, “Jury Deliberates Dahmer Verdict,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 10, 1969; Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994; “Killed by the Klan”; J.C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, 54-55.

note for their families should something happen to them. No one did. The Klansmen packed into a Pontiac and a Ford and drove toward the Dahmer home. When they arrived, they shut off their headlights. The four men in the Ford—Henry DeBoxtel, Charles Noble, Franklin Lyons, and Lester Thornton—circled the store and shot out the windows. Dahmer’s aunt, Luranie Heidelberg asleep inside, awoke to the sounds of gunfire. She threw herself down on the floor just as the Klansmen hurled jugs of gasoline into the store and set the place afire with a torch. Heidelberg crawled desperately toward the back window and escaped into the woods as the store burned to the ground.⁸⁰

Across the Dahmer property at the farmhouse, the Pontiac parked behind several tall trees. Two of the Klansmen, Charles Wilson and William Smith, slipped out of the vehicle, and from positions on the ground began shooting into the house to provide cover for the assault. The leader of the group, Cecil Sessum, and his guard, Billy Roy Pitts, raced toward the house carrying the gasoline-filled jugs. The initial shots shattered a picture window. Sessum heaved two jugs through the shards of glass into the home, another two jugs into the carport, and one into the back of the Dahmer’s pickup truck. Then he ignited a gasoline soaked rag on a stick and hurled it through the shattered window. The gasoline burst into flames, and in moments the house was engulfed in fire. The Klansmen kept their guns trained on the house, continuously shooting in an attempt to trap the Dahmers in the burning home or to kill them should they try to flee.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994; “Negro Leader’s Home Burns,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 10, 1966; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 235. Pitts, written confession; Pitts, typed confession, both in Helfrich Papers. “Killed by the Klan.”

⁸¹ Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 235-236. Pitts, written confession; Pitts, typed confession, both in Helfrich Papers.

The sounds of the attack yanked Ellie Dahmer from sleep, and instantly she knew the Klansmen had finally come for them. She woke her husband, crying “Vernon get up, I believe they got us this time.” As flames spread quickly through the farmhouse, Dahmer jumped out of bed, grabbed his shotgun and yelled, “get the children out while I hold them off.” Three of the Dahmers’ eight children were living at home, Dennis, Bettie, aged 12 and 10, respectively and Harold, aged 25, who had just returned home from his years in the army. Bettie’s room was the only one not blocked by fire. Ellie Dahmer hurried across the hall to retrieve her daughter. She tried to grab Bettie’s coat to wrap around her, but the bullets came through the bedroom walls and windows preventing Ellie from reaching the coat hook. She grabbed Bettie and rushed her out of the room, escaping the steady rain of bullets. They ran to the back of the house. All the window frames in the front were made of aluminum and could not be opened. Flames blocked all passageways to the doors. The back window was their only means of escape. But when Ellie Dahmer tried to raise that window, it stuck. She shoved harder and harder, but it would not budge.⁸²

Bettie looked back through the black smoke at her father who was shooting at someone across the carport. Bettie started screaming, “We’re not going to make it out of here. Lord have mercy, we are going to get burned up.” The fire had spread to the bedroom, and flames vaulted toward Dahmer, searing the skin on his arms. With ragged,

⁸² First and second quote, Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994; third quote, Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 236. Whitehead does not identify the Klansman who yelled at Smith, but Pitts relays the same story in his confession and declares that he was the person who yelled at Smith, see, Pitts, typed confession, Helfrich Papers. Ellie Dahmer, interview; “Killed by the Klan”; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-342, FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-373, Helfrich Papers.

frantic breaths, Dahmer sucked in burning embers and black smoke, but he stood his ground. He had to keep the attackers at bay until his family could escape. Outside, the young guard, Billy Roy Pitts, startled by the tortured sounds of someone inside screaming, raised his eyes to Sessum, who only shrugged, “oh let him die, that’s what we came for.” After several more minutes of shooting, the Klansmen believed that they had trapped the Dahmers inside their home. They fled toward the Pontiac. When Smith saw headlights of the Ford flash at the store, he thought it was someone coming to help the Dahmers. He panicked and fired several rounds into the side of the Ford, piercing one of its tires. “Stop it,” Pitts shouted, “they’re our own men.”⁸³

Inside the burning home, Ellie Dahmer kept shoving hard on the window, trying to force it free, but it was useless. “We’re not going to get out this house,” Bettie cried, as the flames leapt toward them. Finally, her mother heaved her shoulder against the window so hard that she fell through it onto the ground. Moments later, Bettie felt her father’s arms take hold of her and hand her through the window to her mother. Both of their bodies were burning. Bettie collapsed to the ground, rolled on the grass and started screaming. At the far end of the home, Dennis woke his brother Harold, and they escaped through their window. Vernon Dahmer rushed his family and his Aunt Luranie, who had survived the store attack, to the barn, as he feared the night riders might return, but Harold knew his father and sister needed immediate medical care. He saved the family truck from the carport and rushed to his aunt’s for help. Dennis, despite his parent’s protestations, gathered the water hose and tried futilely to save the burning home. Inside the barn, Bettie lay on the ground sobbing in pain, her arms and forehead badly burned.

⁸³ Quoting “Killed by the Klan”; Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994.

She looked across at her father and saw with horror that his burned flesh hung from his arms “like paper hanging down, the skin like a sleeve was hanging off.”⁸⁴

Finally when the Dahmers’ aunt arrived, she rushed Ellie, Vernon, Bettie and Aunt Luranie to the hospital. Dahmer bled all over the front seat. After they left, Dennis dropped the hose, and stood still and quiet “in his underwear and barefooted” next to his big brother Harold watching their house burn. Over a mile away, Kerry Fielder, who had been jarred awake by his dog barking at the noise of the attack, woke his father. Moments later, neighbors knocked at the Fielder’s backdoor—they, too, had heard the shots. Kerry and his father hurried to the Dahmer home. When they arrived, Kerry saw his best friend Dennis in the light of the fire, standing nearly naked with tears streaking his ash-covered face. Kerry raced behind the house where the Dahmers hung their wash on a clothesline. He grabbed a pair of trousers for Dennis.⁸⁵

At the hospital, Ellie Dahmer frantically paced the halls in her bare feet. A black nurse gave her a blanket and later brought the Dahmers clothes and shoes. Doctors covered Dahmer’s burned flesh with bandages from his waist to his neck and sedated him, but it barely diminished the severe pain. Within hours, reporters and friends rushed to the hospital. NAACP President J. C. Fairley hurried to his friend’s bedside where Dahmer said to him, “They got me. Be careful. Carry the work on. It’s worth dying for,

⁸⁴ First quote, Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 236; second quote in both Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994 and “Killed by the Klan”; fourth quote, “Killed by the Klan.” FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-349, Helfrich Papers.

⁸⁵ First quote, “Killed by the Klan”; second quote, Nikki Davis Maute, “No Peace,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1994; third quote, Kerry Fielder, interview. Ellie Dahmer, interview; Vernon Dahmer Jr., interview by Re’Tin D. Gray, April 1, 2001, MOHP recording; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File # 44-1512-349, vol. 9, Helfrich Papers.

and the worst is left to do.” Later, speaking to one of the reporters from his hospital bed, Dahmer said, “I’ve been active in trying to get people to register to vote; people who don’t vote are deadbeats on the state. I figure a man has got to do his own thinking. What happened to us last night can happen to anybody, white or black.” Ellie Dahmer could not stop crying despite her husband’s promise “that everything was going to be all right.” It would not. Vernon Dahmer suffered from severe burns, smoke inhalation, and massive damage to his respiratory system. In the afternoon, Dennis and Harold arrived at the hospital. Their father sat up in the bed, tried to speak to them, but then he fell back. “And that was it,” Dennis recalled, “he was dead. He was gone.” Not ready to accept his death, Ellie called for the nurses, and Bettie rushed to the nurse station. It seemed forever before they responded. Then Ellie realized “it was too late. He was gone. I never went back in the room. They kept us in another room. . . . I don’t reckon anyone could have prepared me for losing him. . . . Others knew Vernon was dying, but I couldn’t see that.”⁸⁶

At the time of Dahmer’s death, one of his sons, Carroll G. Dahmer, lived in Ipsilanti, Michigan and four of his sons were serving their country in the U. S. military: Sergeant George W. Dahmer, stationed in Homestead, Florida; Staff Sergeant Martinez Dahmer, stationed in Sinemya, Alaska; Private Alvin Hulon Dahmer, stationed in Seinfurt, Germany; and Master Sergeant Vernon Dahmer, Jr., stationed in Riverside, California. Alvin Dahmer heard the news of his father’s death on the radio in Germany.

⁸⁶ First quote, Carol Ann Estes, “The Death of Vernon Dahmer: Klan Violence and Mississippi Justice in the 1960s” (B. A. honor’s thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 1988), 29; second quote, “Firebombing Victim Dies,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 11, 1966; third and sixth quotes, Nikki Davis Maute, “Her Memories of Firebombing,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1994; fourth and fifth quotes, “Killed by the Klan.” Elliot Chaze, “Officers Satisfied,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 14, 1966; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-373, Helfrich Papers.

He later recalled: “I was listening because I thought we were going to Vietnam, and I heard about Daddy.” All five sons hurried home. Although overwhelmed and devastated by the loss of his father, Vernon, Jr. struggled to meet the obligations of the oldest child—he tried to take care of his family, bury his father, and help in the investigation. He had “no time to cry.” But there would be much time in the years ahead to confront the pain. Over the past year, Dahmer had been writing his son Alvin about new farming methods for cotton. After his service was complete, Alvin had plans to return to his roots in the Kelly Settlement and build a life alongside his family. Later, he noted, “I was coming back to join [Dad].” Instead he returned home to bury him.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ First and third quotes, Nikki Davis Maute, “No Peace,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1994; second quote, “Killed by the Klan.” Vernon Dahmer Service Reset,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1966; Vernon Dahmer Jr., interview by Re’Tina D. Gray, April 1, 2001, MOHP recording.

CHAPTER VII:
INFILTRATION: THE FBI WAR ON THE KLAN

The Klansmen celebrated the news of Vernon Dahmer's death, but they worried too: they had made many mistakes. Thirteen hours earlier, after the Klansmen had driven a few miles away from the burning home and store, the tires on the Ford blew out, and the car came to a halt. The Pontiac slid alongside it, and the panicked Klansmen gathered around the Ford. Someone suggested burning it, but they had used all of their gasoline to burn the Dahmer home and store. Then one of the Klansmen, 22-year-old Billy Roy Pitts, realized he had made a horrible blunder. His holster had broken, and his gun was gone. We have to go back, he shouted. But it was too late. The place soon would be crawling with federal officers. The Klansmen abandoned the Ford on the side of the road, crammed inside the Pontiac, and rushed toward Jones County. Pitts looked over at the Exalted Cyclops, Cecil Sessum, and snapped, "I . . . told [you] I didn't feel things would go right." Sessum said nothing until they reached his house.¹

Once inside Sessum's home, the Klansmen gathered around the Exalted Cyclops for a final debriefing. Any of you talk, Sessum warned, "it's a barrel of cement." The diminutive dark-haired preacher fixed his piercing blue eyes on Pitts. If you "hadn't lost your gun," Sessum snarled, and then turning to Smith, if "you hadn't shot the car up, it would have been a perfect project." Pitts towered over Sessum in height and weight, but the ruddy-faced Klansmen feared Sessum because he had a harsh, unpredictable temper.

¹ Quoting Billy Roy Pitts, typed confession, September 30, 1967, Jackson, Mississippi, FBI File, #44-31694-555, 9. Ibid, 7-8, and Billy Roy Pitts, written confession, n. d., no FBI File, # [?], pp. 13-14, both in Billy Roy Pitts Notebook, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Pitts, typed confession; and Pitts, written confession, Helfrich Papers].

Pitts insisted that no one could trace the gun to him because he had purchased it without ever filling out any paperwork. Still, as Sessum berated him, he began panicking again. Sessum turned his attention to the more immediate problem—the abandoned Ford. Police would easily trace the car to Travis Giles, who had lent his Klan brothers his vehicle for the Dahmer project. Sessum ordered Henry DeBoxtel to track down Giles at the Masonite plant and tell him to report the vehicle stolen. Before dismissing his men, Sessum warned them to “keep their mouths shut . . . anyone who decide[s] to be a pimp [will] die.” Later, they all met with Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers, who castigated them for their many gaffes on the project. Still, Bowers was ecstatic about the murder, and he told them not to worry: “all they had to do was keep quiet.” Even if the feds managed to bring them to trial, “no jury in Mississippi would convict a white man for killing a nigger.”²

Bowers failed to understand that he had made a grave error when he ordered his Klan to murder Vernon Dahmer. The upper-middle class farmer and business owner was well-liked by many prominent local whites, beloved by the black community, and held in high esteem by the Department of Justice officials, who for nearly a decade had worked with him on voting discrimination cases. To the African American community, Dahmer was their everyday hero, and after his death he became their martyr. Hattiesburg native

² First, second and third quotes, Pitts, written confession, Helfrich Papers; fourth quote, Pitts, typed confession, Helfrich Papers; fifth and sixth quotes Robert Helfrich, speech, “Pursuing a Late Justice: The Prosecution of Mississippi’s Civil Rights Murders, Then and Now,” August 29, 2000, videocassette, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]. James K. Dukes, speech, “Pursuing a Late Justice,” McCain, USM. FBI Report, March 30, 1966, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-82; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, both in Helfrich Papers. For Pitts appearance, see FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 10, 1966, Billy Roy Pitts, FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512, Helfrich Papers. For Sessum’s explosive temper, see, FBI Report, January 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, #44-1512-145, Helfrich Papers.

Douglass Baker, who had recently integrated the University of Mississippi's Law School and who had known Dahmer his entire life, reflected that sentiment in a letter to the *Hattiesburg American*. Dahmer, he noted, could have easily passed for white, but he chose to be a "Negro—and chose to be a man. Forfeiting the privileges that could easily have been his, he stood, lived and died for the cause of human dignity. . . . [His] spirit of freedom is the legacy he has left to every citizen, for he only sought to open the door of humanity to man." Dahmer's murder ignited his community to protest, stirred outrage across the nation, and incited fear among local authorities, who worried that the Klan killing would intensify federal intervention in their county. They had reason to worry.³

The murder of Vernon Dahmer centered the federal war against the Klan in the Central Piney Woods, and it drove a stake into Forrest County's façade of racial moderation. As the FBI converged upon the Central Piney Woods, its agents established powerful beachheads in Jones and Forrest counties and moved toward the heart of Klan headquarters in Laurel. The FBI's war on the White Knights and the negative publicity forced a shift within the Central Piney Woods' white supremacist citadel of law and order. City and county authorities in Forrest County scrambled to sustain Hattiesburg's reputation as a racially moderate town to avoid a full-blown assault on its Jim Crow system by fully cooperating with the FBI, by mustering all their power to destroy Bowers and his minions, and by blaming the murder on outsiders—Klansmen from Jones County. Citizens responded ambivalently. Progressive whites were outraged. Many moderates and conservatives expressed indignation, in part because they considered the attack on a family an evil act, but more of them were incensed because the murder precipitated

³ Quoting Douglass T. Baker, "Dahmer Tribute," *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1966. "Firebombing Victim Dies," *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 11, 1966.

massive federal intervention in Forrest County, which threatened their control over their politics, their economy, and the privileges that came with their white skin in their southern way of life. Radical whites from Klansmen to Klan sympathizers applauded the killing as a victory against the enemy. Unlike whites, blacks were united in their indignation. As Dahmer would have hoped, blacks channeled that fury toward an aggressive attack on white supremacy, for his killing provided blacks with a powerful forum to demand a comprehensive reconstruction of the racial order. African-American leaders rejuvenated weary black activists, and blacks who had remained outside the Movement came in droves to protests.

Although these momentous developments instigated a significant shift in racial justice, Dahmer's tragic death failed to produce a watershed in the tortured history of race relations in Mississippi's Central Piney Woods, because the white supremacist-controlled community in Forrest County refused to accept an unconditional surrender of Jim Crow. Rather, the mostly conservative white patriarchs moved toward a moderate stance as they struggled to negotiate a system that provided blacks more rights, while still sustaining a degree of segregation and absolute white control over the sociopolitical milieu. Moreover, the conservative white leaders in Jones County, with few exceptions, remained wholly committed to sustaining racial absolutism, and they faced few challenges from the declining Laurel Movement. In Forrest County, the months following Dahmer's murder represented a time of tumultuous transitions, of growing white moderation and deepening black resolve. The murder cracked the fortress of white supremacy, but it would take years for the fissure to expand and force the walls of Leviathan to crumble.

Black activists in Mississippi and across the nation responded to Dahmer's

murder with outrage and a demand for justice. Executive Director of the NAACP Roy Wilkins called the killing of Dahmer “part of a war on NAACP frontline branch officers and on the Civil Rights Crusade.” He demanded that Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach investigate the case, and he pressured the U. S. Congress through a national letter-writing campaign to pass a bill to protect the lives and property of blacks.

Lawrence Guyot, the Chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, insisted that Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr. mobilize the state agencies to terminate racial injustice and declared that “the Negro people of Mississippi are tired of living in an atmosphere of terror.” Local activists, like Raylawni Branch, praised Dahmer’s work and his bold stand against the Klan. Branch noted that “he died like a man: he died fighting back.” She and other black activists rejuvenated the Movement, determined to ensure that their beloved friend and leader had not died in vain.⁴

Federal officials shared black outrage over Dahmer’s murder and mobilized to break the back of the Klan. In the early morning hours of January 10, when Roy Moore, Special Agent in Charge of the Jackson Office, learned of the Dahmer attack on the radio,

⁴ First quote, Roy Wilkins to [?], January 11, 1966, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 11, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]; second quote, Lawrence Guyot to Governor Paul Johnson, January 10, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 9, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]; third quote, Raylawni Branch, interview by Kim Adams, October 25, 1993, vol. 682, 8, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews in printed volumes cited by volume, interviews in the digital collection cited as MOHP Digital, and recordings in this collection cited as MOHP recording. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. Roy Wilkins to Nicholas Katzenbach, January 10, 1966, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 11, NAACP Papers; Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 24, 2008, MOHP recording.

he vowed to “get the bastards who did this.” Moore ordered the handful of agents assigned to Hattiesburg to acquire office space for him and reserve a dozen rooms at the local Holiday Inn to house the army of agents he ordered into Forrest County to launch the DABURN (Dahmer burning) investigation. FBI headquarters in Washington D. C. backed Moore and demanded that agents aggressively investigate the case. The FBI also had the full support of the Department of Justice. On January 11, 1966, Attorney General Katzenbach, who knew Dahmer personally and held him in high regard, pledged that the FBI and the Department of Justice would employ all of its resources to find and punish the perpetrators. President Lyndon B. Johnson dispatched a telegram to Ellie Dahmer the day after her husband’s death expressing his condolences, and he praised Dahmer’s registration work as in “the best tradition of a democracy.” Two days after the fatal Klan attack, in his State of the Union Address, President Johnson called on the U. S. Congress to pass “legislation to strengthen authority of Federal courts to try those who murder, attack, or intimidate either civil rights workers or others exercising their constitutional rights” and to increase the punishment for the commission of such crimes.⁵

Publicly, state and local officials fell in line with the federal government.

Governor Johnson ordered an investigation into the attack. He issued a public statement characterizing the perpetrators as “morally bankrupt,” and he called for all Mississippians

⁵ First quote, Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan’s Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi), 29, *Ibid.*, 72; second quote, President Lyndon B. Johnson to Ellie Dahmer, January 11, 1966, Vernon F. Dahmer Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Dahmer Collection]; third quote, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, State of the Union Address, in John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 391. Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 238; “Firebombing Victim Dies,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 11, 1966; “Killed by the Klan,” prod. and dir. by Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette.

to cooperate with law enforcement in their investigation and to ignore “the cowardly voices of hate and fear which would destroy us.” Despite Governor Johnson’s encouraging sentiment and the mobilization of his resources against the Klan, he also used his office to suppress Movement activism. Although he certainly cooperated with the FBI by dispatching Mississippi Highway Patrolmen (MHP) to work with FBI agents on the Dahmer case, he also used the patrolmen to spy on the revived Hattiesburg Movement. Throughout his term as governor, Johnson demanded and received MHP reports on the Dahmer investigation and the Hattiesburg Movement. A practical conservative segregationist, Johnson intended to suppress both Klan violence and black protest because the racial upheavals that they instigated threatened both Jim Crow and the economic development of Mississippi.⁶

In the Central Piney Woods, local newspapers, community leaders, officials and white citizens expressed their consternation over the murder. The *Hattiesburg American* called the attack, “a revolting, cowardly crime,” described the killers as “terrorists,” and declared that “those who oppose terrorism must not rest until justice has been done.” The editors of the *Laurel Leader-Call* also demanded that authorities bring the killers to justice. They invoked the words of Judge Lunsford Casey who noted that unless juries had the courage to return indictments against persons committing unlawful acts, “there will come a day when lawlessness will take over our country and fear will be in every heart.” President of the Forrest County Board of Supervisors Selby C. Bowling and Hattiesburg Mayor Paul E. Grady along with the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce

⁶ Quoting Governor Paul B. Johnson, press release, January 11, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 5, PBJ Papers. “Racial Violence,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 27, 1966; Mississippi Highway Patrol Reports, January 10, 1966 - September 18, 1967, PBJ Papers.

pledged their support and cooperation in the investigation. The Hattiesburg City Commissioners and the Forrest County Board of Supervisors backed their words of condemnation by creating the “Dahmer Family Fund” to rebuild the Dahmer home. Chamber of Commerce leaders coordinated the rebuilding project. They established accounts at the three major banks and solicited contributions. The president of the First National Bank opened the first account with a deposit from his bank. The NAACP had also offered to finance the rebuilding of the Dahmer home, but Ellie Dahmer deferred to the city because white supremacy had created the environment for the attack and because white-owned insurance companies had arbitrarily canceled the Dahmer’s insurance policy. She also hoped that accepting the city’s offer would foster racial reconciliation.⁷

The killing also troubled many ordinary white citizens in Mississippi including Mr. Waldvogel, the assistant football coach and science teacher at the all-white Thames Junior High School. Waldvogel lived near the Dahmers on a small farm. The day after the murder, Waldvogel told his students that “his real good friend . . . a black man,” Vernon Dahmer, had been murdered. He revealed that he had consulted Dahmer about cultivating crops; and they became close friends to the point that he had often dined in Dahmer’s home and had the Dahmers as guests in his home. As he spoke of Dahmer as

⁷ First, second, and third quotes “A Tragedy for Everybody,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966; fourth quote, “Death Inquiry Goes On; Law, Order Must Prevail,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 13, 1966. Vernon Dahmer, Jr., interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 3, 2001, MOHP, recording. President of Forrest County Board of Supervisors and Mayor Paul E. Grady, press release, January 10, 1966, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as HMR]; “Firebombing Victim Dies,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 11, 1966; “Dahmer Family Fund Created,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966; Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes, January 12, 1966, Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Papers, McCain, USM; Elliott Chaze, “Push Probe of Fire Bomb,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966; Ellie Dahmer, interview by Orley Caudill, July 2, 1974, MOHP Digital.

an extraordinary man, tears filled his eyes. A student in the class, Billy McGee, who decades later became the sheriff of Forrest County, watched his teacher and coach in awe for it was the first time he had seen a grown man weep. McGee also considered it “profound for that teacher to be that broken down by a black man. That didn’t happen. And particularly to stand up and say that he was my friend. I loved this man. . . . this is a great man.” Waldvogel’s public sorrow likely opened the minds of many of his pupils to view their segregated world differently. It moved McGee and would help shape his reaction to the civil rights shifts on the horizon.⁸

In the early days after the killing, it seemed that racial reconciliation might indeed emerge from the tragedy. The white community bolstered its strong words with significant action. Ralph Noonkester, President of Baptist-affiliated William Carey College, headed the committee to rebuild the Dahmer home. The committee included many other prominent residents of Forrest County, such as Marvin Reuben of WDAM-TV, Hank Downey of WHST radio, and John Hyde of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. In addition to donating funds, community members offered their services and supplies for free. Architect Pete Baricev promised to design the home. Masonite and the Frierson Building Company pledged to furnish building supplies. Quick and Grice offered its plumbing services. The Canterbury and Newman Clubs of the University of Southern Mississippi along with Plasters and Cement Works Company announced they would provide laborers. The Red Cross’ executive board in Forrest County collected donations such as garments, food, and house furnishings for the Dahmer family.⁹

⁸ Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, MOHP recording.

Local law enforcement, including Forrest County Sheriff W. G. “Bud” Gray, and court officials, including James Dukes and James Finch, also condemned the murder and pledged their cooperation in the FBI investigation. Local authorities infused the Dahmer investigation with the same zeal they had used to suppress the Movement, though each pursued the case for a myriad of varied reasons. Some acted out of moral outrage over the murder of a man they liked and respected. Others hunted Klansmen because they hoped cooperation would preclude a massive federal attack on their county that would dismantle forever Jim Crow. Nearly all of them tried to maintain the myth of Hattiesburg as more moderate on the race question by blaming the crime on outsiders, as they were certain it was a klavern from Jones County that had committed the crime. They downplayed the participation of the Forrest County Klavern, as well as the white supremacist environment that precipitated the murder. In the xenophobic state, citizens often perceived residents of other counties as outsiders; and it was far easier for white patriarchs and the citizenry to turn against Klansmen outside their county lines than against those who lived among them. Regardless of the motive, local authorities mobilized their forces toward the investigation immediately. FBI Agent William Dukes, who had also worked on the 1964 murder of the three civil rights activists in the Neshoba case, found Forrest County authorities much more cooperative. It helped that prosecutor Jimmy Dukes was his brother. In Neshoba and in its county seat of Philadelphia, several law enforcement officers, including the sheriff and his deputy, were Klansmen involved in the murder, and others leaked information to the Klan. Few law enforcement officers in Forrest County had joined the Klan, and no officer working on the Dahmer case was

⁹ Virginia Woodward, “Groundwork is Laid,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 8, 1966; “Red Cross,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966.

affiliated with or sympathized with the Klan. Thus, the local, state, and federal officers developed a cooperative and trusting relationship.¹⁰

When the FBI, along with the Mississippi Highway Patrol and local law enforcement, launched an aggressive investigation just hours after the attack, the Central Piney Woods experienced a pivotal shift away from Jim Crow justice. From the onset, the investigation moved swiftly and meticulously. Just after 6:00 a.m. on January 10, Special Agents J. L. Martin and Loren C. Brooks accompanied Deputy Sheriff T. A. Woodward to the Dahmer farm where they found neighbors gathered around the burned store and home. A few timbers continued to burn as the agents established a perimeter and began searching the scene. Within a few hours, six Mississippi Highway Patrolmen began to work in conjunction with the FBI on the case. Immediately, the FBI suspected that Sam Bowers had ordered a local klavern from the Central Piney Woods to target Dahmer. Agents knew that Bowers, who resided in nearby Jones County, led the largest and most violent Klan in the state. Agents across Mississippi called on their Klan informants. One informant claimed that Bowers had boasted to him, “the Laurel group scored a big one and the men involved were better than the Philadelphia group. The technical end was not as good as the Philadelphia job . . . but these men won’t talk.”¹¹

¹⁰ For the myth of Hattiesburg as a racially moderate town, and James K. Dukes’ perspective of the Dahmer case, see James K. Dukes, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, MOHP recording; and James K. Dukes, speech, August 29, 2000, “Pursuing a Late Justice,” McCain, USM. For commitment to the case by Finch, Dukes, and Gray see Elliott Chaze, “15 Requests,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 12, 1966; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 237-238; Elliott Chaze, “Push Probe of Fire Bomb,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966; “Killed by the Klan”; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 29, 72; Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Case Key in Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991, Dahmer Collection.

Agents and officers found a plethora of evidence at the crime scene, including shotgun shells, three bullet holes in the rear of the cab of the Dahmer pickup truck, and a white plastic jug containing gasoline. They also found a .22 caliber Magnum Rohm revolver about 10 yards from the foundation of the burned home. Although the fire had melted the grips of the gun, the agents could clearly read the serial number. Agents also found tire tracks and a Ford hubcap with bullet holes. With the help of Dahmer's neighbor Major Bourn, they followed the tracks from the home to an abandoned 1963 light blue Ford about three and a half miles from the Dahmer property on Monroe Road. The Ford had flat tires on the left front and right rear wheels, as well as markings on the frame, tires, and along the body of the Ford. They suspected the markings would match the shotgun shells that they had recovered from the crime scene. Agents and police traced the vehicle to Howard Travis Giles, a Klansmen in the Ellisville Klavern. Giles had a criminal record that included a four-year stint in Joliet, Illinois for grand larceny in the 1940s. They could not make an immediate arrest, however, because Giles had reported the Ford stolen earlier that morning.¹²

As agents, state investigators, and local officers aggressively pursued the case, the

¹¹ Quoting FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 2, #44-1512-126, Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 238. T. B. Birdsong to A. D. Morgan, January 11, 1966; Charles E. Snodgrass to Sam Ivy, January 11, 1966, both in Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers. SAC Jackson to Director, January 10, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-1 and #44-152-8, FBI Report, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-294, all in Helfrich Papers.

¹² FBI Report, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-294; FBI Report January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-294; FBI Report, January 12, 1966, vol. 9, DABURN FBI File, # 44-1512-332; John T. Kelly to SAC, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-35, all in Helfrich Papers. Mississippi Department of Public Safety Report, January 11, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers, [hereinafter cited as MDPS Report].

Klansmen grew worried. Several of the Dahmers' black neighbors, including Leon and Lovenia Wilson, and one white neighbor, Jay B. Smith, informed agents that around 2:00 a.m., they saw two vehicles, one that resembled the abandoned Ford, pass their homes and head south toward the Dahmer farm; a little while later, both cars passed their homes again heading north. The Ford sounded like it had a flat tire. Although Smith admitted that he had recognized some of the men in the car, he refused to give agents their names. The day after Smith spoke with the FBI, he received a threatening phone call in his store from a man warning him to "keep your mouth shut." When Smith challenged the caller to threaten him in person, the Klansman slammed down the phone. Afterward, Smith told agents that if someone attacked him, they should search his wallet for a slip of paper containing the names of the men he saw on the night of the Dahmer burning. Eventually, agents convinced Smith to become a state's witness, but for awhile he refused to identify the men he saw in the car.¹³

The FBI and local investigators already had a few names in mind—starting with Giles, the owner of the blue Ford. When Agents Donald R. Hamrick and Robert A. Connors questioned Giles about his whereabouts on January 9 and 10, he claimed he had parked his vehicle in the Masonite parking lot at 10:30 p.m. that night, worked until 7:00 the following morning, and ate breakfast at the Chow House Restaurant, located across the road from Masonite. Soon afterward, he found his vehicle missing and reported it stolen. He admitted that he had left the keys inside the vehicle and his door unlocked, but

¹³ Quoting FBI Report, April 8, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 32, #44-1512-2658, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, # 44-1512-331; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-327; FBI Reports, January 12 and 13, 1966, in Investigative Report, January 9-20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 9, #44-1512-132, all in Helfrich Papers.

he claimed that he never gave any persons permission to use his vehicle. Initially, Giles agreed to take a polygraph examination, but he failed to appear at the scheduled appointment and later refused to take the exam.¹⁴

More than a little skeptical of Giles' story, agents spread out into the Jones County community and found several witnesses who insisted that Giles never made it a practice to leave his keys in the ignition nor his car unlocked. Agents also learned that Giles's wife, Ruby, always drove the Ford, and Giles had only used it once—on the night of January 9. He went out of his way to exchange his truck with his wife's Ford that night as he had to track her down at a friend's home to swap vehicles before rushing to his shift at Masonite. Agents also questioned Henry DeBoxtel, manager of the Chow House Restaurant, where Giles had called police to report the Ford stolen. Although DeBoxtel denied ever joining the Klan, informants reported that DeBoxtel had joined the White Knights in 1964. Agents also knew that the Klan regularly used the Chow House Restaurant for Klan meetings. From Ruby Lee Bender, a cook at the Chow House, agents learned that on the morning of the Dahmer killing, DeBoxtel opened the restaurant more than two hours late. Bender later saw Bowers enter the restaurant and speak in hushed tones with DeBoxtel. Soon after DeBoxtel opened the restaurant, he announced that he was going home to bed because he had stayed up the entire night.¹⁵

¹⁴ FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, # 44-1512-246, Helfrich Papers; Charles E. Snodgrass to A. D. Morgan, January 11, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

¹⁵ FBI Report, February 2-4, 1966, Henry DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433, 39-48; FBI Report, January 13, 1966, vol. 8, #44-1512-230, #44-1512-231, #44-1512-225; Howard Travis Giles Investigation, February 7, 8, 17, 1966, 161, 164-65, 170-171, 181-182, all in FBI Supplemental Investigation Regarding Neighborhood of Dahmer Home, DABURN FBI File: 44-1512, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, January 17, 1966,

Giles's abandoned vehicle opened a porthole into the Invisible Empire. Agents hoped the gun found on the Dahmer property would illuminate another. The gun, however, became a serious problem in the investigation. The gun's serial number—6403—led agents to R. A. Mayberry's gun shop in Laurel. Mayberry, however, had incorrectly labeled the sale of a gun with serial number 6403 to a man named Jimmy Jones, who had then sold it to a pawn shop. When agents located the gun at the pawn shop, the serial number was 6402. Eventually, investigators learned that at one point R. A. Mayberry had both guns at his store, sold the gun with serial number 6402 to Jones, but noted the sale incorrectly as 6403. After interviewing several persons in the community, investigators theorized that Mayberry had sold 6403 to either the Klansman who attacked the Dahmer home or to someone else who eventually sold it to the Klansman. He had neglected to document correctly the exchange in his records.¹⁶ While FBI agents along with state and local lawmen moved into the heart of the White Knights territory in Jones County in search of the link between the gun and the Klansman, black activists in Forrest County rose to voice their rage and demand the wholesale destruction of Jim Crow.

On the night of Dahmer's death, local blacks flooded the streets of Hattiesburg to memorialize Dahmer and to carry on his battle for black liberation. During the memorial service at St. James Methodist Church, black leaders declared that Dahmer's "sacrifice on

DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, File 157-433-[?], 202; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-35, 8, both in Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 238-239.

¹⁶ FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File vol. 1, #157-854-67; FBI Report, April 29, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 46, #44-1512-4058; Trial Notes, .22 Caliber Rohm Revolver, #6403, Oversize Materials, all in Helfrich Papers.

the altar of freedom should inspire us to finish the task.” Veteran activist Daisy Harris stood among them. She had never seen so many local blacks simultaneously protest until that night: “the streets were just full,” and the rage palpable. “I think that was the only time . . . the policemen [were] afraid to come into our area because they knew everybody was angry.” After the service, Charles Evers, the NAACP field secretary for Mississippi, led a procession of the mourners to the Forrest County courthouse where he suggested that blacks boycott white stores until the white power structure hired more black firemen, constables, deputies, and policemen. Evers called on the people to carry on Dahmer’s fight. He declared that “the only thing the white man understands is the ballot and the dollar. We’re going to get both of them. . . . You take away the white man’s ballots and his dollars and you remove his power.” President of the Forrest County NAACP Reverend J. C. Fairley rallied the crowd to action as he shouted, “I don’t need to tell you that another man is dead. I hope you realize the ideals he died for and that we won’t let his death be in vain. If you haven’t paid your poll tax do it immediately. If you haven’t gotten down to the registrar’s office and placed your name on the book, do it. This is what he died for. The life of a Negro is taken too lightly. When one of us is killed nothing is done about it.” Determined to act this time, black leaders effectively transformed sorrow and rage into hope and resolve. Dahmer’s tragic death became the rallying cry for the revitalized Movement.¹⁷

¹⁷ First quote, Vernon F. Dahmer Memorial Program, January 15, 1966, Dahmer Collection; second and third quotes, Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording; fourth quote Elliott Chaze, “Push Probe of Fire Bomb,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, January 11, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; “Nightriders Kill Mississippi Negro,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1966, Dahmer Collection; “Firebombing Victim Dies,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 11, 1966.

By the next day, the NAACP and the Delta Ministry had compiled a comprehensive inventory of the discrimination blacks continued to face in Forrest County. On January 11 at a mass meeting at St. James Church, Fairley presented the list to the hundreds of attendees for approval. The black community, Fairley announced, demanded that the white establishment hire black deputy sheriffs, bus drivers, and fire fighters. Law enforcement agencies must provide black officers with the same authority as their white counterparts, and they must terminate the common practice of police brutality against blacks. Authorities must comply with federal laws, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which required them to desegregate juries, public spaces, and hospitals; they must implement the *Brown* ruling and congressional legislation to integrate public schools and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which obliged Theron Lynd to treat black and white voters equally. To ensure that blacks not only enjoyed voting rights but political power, the city fathers must develop a biracial government by incorporating blacks on the city commission. To tackle infrastructure deficiencies and health and safety hazards in black residential areas, the public works department must pave roads and construct lighting and sewage systems in black communities, eliminate rampant factory toxins that poisoned black quarters, and treat black and white neighborhoods with equity. Finally, the media must address all persons, regardless of race, with courtesy titles. The impassioned crowds approved of the list immediately.¹⁸ The resolve of the black community proved strong and remained so throughout the remainder of the decade.

Divisiveness, however, also emerged in the community that night. When Fairley

¹⁸ Elliot Chaze, "15 Requests," *Hattiesburg American*, January 12, 1966.

informed the assembly that the NAACP and the Delta Ministry had decided to delay a boycott to give the city fathers time to implement the demands, several angry people shouted that the NAACP and the Delta Ministry were not the only organizations representing Forrest County. A group of blacks distributed leaflets throughout the crowd which called for a black boycott of downtown stores until “the criminals responsible for Mr. Dahmer’s Assassination are brought to JUSTICE.” Fairley welcomed other organizations to initiate a boycott. But the hecklers ignored Fairley and began shouting “freedom . . . freedom.” Fairley backed away from the crowd and slumped into his chair. Charles Evers took the lectern and scolded the crowd: “you are doing just what they [the segregationists] want us to do, they want to split us among ourselves.” Gloster Current, director of branches from national NAACP headquarters in New York, urged blacks to maintain unity and fight for the vote that Dahmer, “an old warrior in Mississippi,” had struggled so hard to achieve. Evoking a metaphor of Jesus Christ, he reminded them that Dahmer “died so that we might live.” Afterward, the black crowds marched to the courthouse where they knelt in prayer. For the moment, the leaders had succeeded in quelling the divisiveness.¹⁹

However, as some veteran black leaders along with the rank-and-file became impatient with the slow pace of change, they moved toward more militant ideologies, and many of them began to demonstrate openly a willingness to fight violence with violence. At various rallies, Evers emphasized the dangers of the Klan, and he informed crowds

¹⁹ “NAACP Lists,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 12, 1966. The NAACP leaders made a few changes on the list; they replaced the demand for including blacks in city governing and the desegregation of juries with demands for white owned businesses to hire black clerks, see Elliot Chaze, “NAACP Revises,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1966.

that he believed in self-defense, while noting that he maintained two guards with high powered rifles at his home in Jackson. Many local activists had always embraced the concept of self-defense. In the wake of Dahmer's death, some activists began openly carrying guns in public, or like Evers, hiring body guards. Fairley, who continually received Klan threats, hired a local black Korean War veteran, James Nix, and several of his friends to provide him with armed protection in public and at his home. Evers' language grew more aggressive over the course of the revitalized Hattiesburg Movement. He delivered several passionate speeches in Forrest County, many of them in front of the courthouse to large crowds of blacks. At one rally, he informed his audience that "I hope the Ku Klux Klan of this state realizes that Negroes are no longer afraid. Every time you kill one of us, 10,000 more of us will march." He pointed out that all the law enforcement officers and FBI agents working on the Dahmer case and other civil rights cases were "lily white." He called Judge Harold Cox a "Kluxxer," and he insinuated authorities would avoid arresting suspects in the Dahmer case. Evers also ignited the desire for revenge among the black community, when he shouted, "the sooner we bury some of these Klukkers the sooner we will be finished with this kind of thing."²⁰

As Hattiesburg activists initiated their second great rebellion against white supremacy, federal and state law enforcement forces, particularly the ubiquitous

²⁰ First quote, James Bonney, "Negroes Ask For Hearing," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 17, 1966; second quote, E. F. Ray to Morgan, MDPS Report, January 13, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; third quote, A.L. Hopkins, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, January 20, 1966, Vernon Dahmer File, Sovereignty Commission Report #2-64-1-94-1-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR#, MDAH]; fourth quote Elliott Chaze, "Officers Satisfied," *Hattiesburg American*, January 14, 1966. Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; James Nix, interview by Sarah Rowe, March 7, 1993, MOHP Digital.

Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission investigators, circled the periphery of the revolt to observe and sometimes to suppress it. Although the commission refrained from directly confronting black activists, blacks knew that commission investigators were constantly lurking in the shadows, watching, observing, taking notes, and delivering reports to powerful people. The FBI also continued surveillance of the Movement.

Worried that Evers might incite a riot, Special Agent Roy Moore met with Evers in hopes of convincing him that his rhetoric was more harmful than helpful. Afterward, Evers still held rallies at which he lambasted whites and threatened boycotts, but he also chastised blacks who bucked the NAACP leadership. When 25 blacks, most of them teenagers, picketed the courthouse with signs stating, “Don’t Buy—Stay Away From Downtown,” Evers urged them to give the city fathers time to respond to the grievance list. He proved less patient, however, with the Dahmer investigation and frequently criticized authorities for failing to make an immediate arrest.²¹

For the Dahmer family, those winter days proved difficult as they struggled to adjust to the relentless pain of life without Vernon and to cope with the horror of how they had lost him. Alvin Dahmer, serving in Germany at the time of his father’s death, found it unbelievable that while four of his father’s sons were protecting American freedom and democracy from threats abroad, the Klan had murdered his father because he was fighting for that very liberty and democracy denied him in his home state. For

²¹ Quoting Elliott Chaze, “Officers Satisfied,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 14, 1966; E. F. Ray to Morgan, MDPS Report, January 13, 1966. A. L. Hopkins, MSSC Report, January 20, 1966, SCR, #2-64-1-94-1-1-1; newspaper clipping, MSSC Report, January 22, 1966, SCR# 10-28-0-32-1-1-1; newspaper clippings, MSSC Report, January 18, 1966, SCR #6-36-0-55-1-1-1; A.L. Hopkins, MSSC Report, January 20, 1966, SCR# 2-64-1-94-1-1-1, all at MDAH. Elliott Chaze, “NAACP Revises Its Grievance List,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1966; James Bonney, “Negroes Ask For Hearing,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 17, 1966.

Dahmer's youngest children, his death terminated their innocence and altered the trajectory of their lives. Ellie Dahmer later recalled, "For years my children didn't laugh and play. They lost their childhood." On the night that Dennis watched his home burn, he lost interest in life. He later recalled that "nothing seemed to matter to me for a long time. I kept living and going to school because that's what my mother wanted me to do, but it was many years before I learned to live with the pain." Dennis's best friend, 10-year-old Kerry Fielder, deeply mourned "Mr. Vernon" who had always "treated me like a son." Dahmer's death "put a scar on me." Fielder stayed with Dennis at a relative's house the night of the attack, and he continued to stay near Dennis and the Dahmers in the years that followed. The murder cast a pall over their young lives.²²

The killing also terrorized children throughout Forrest County. Cheryl Outlaw had known fear of whites before, but "this was the first time we heard that they actually killed somebody. . . you didn't know who did it. . . [just] the Klan." Former Freedom Summer students Carol and Lillie Jackson had attended school with Dennis and Bettie, and the murder stunned them. Bettie remained out of school for a while because of her injuries, but when she came back, the children noticed her scars. They started to understand the gnawing terror of the Klan. They became more aware of the black men in Palmers Crossing carrying guns to mass meetings and standing guard at civil rights events. They noticed the armed guards who protected their aunt, Victoria Gray, and worried that night riders may come to their neighborhood. In the Kelly Settlement, Fielder had heard about Klansmen before, but he had felt insulated from their violence. After Dahmer's murder,

²² First and second quote, Nikki Davis Maute, "No Peace for Dahmer Family," *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1994; all other quotes, Kerry Fielder, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 4, 2001, MOHP recording; Ellie Dahmer, interview.

Kerry stopped walking home at night. Everyone in Forrest County wondered: “Whose next? That was the question. Whose next?” Fielder became intimately familiar with rage. His parents tried to convince him that he could not condemn all white people for the sins of a few, but it was difficult not to hate whites because white supremacy led to the murder of Dahmer.²³

The murder also spread fear and rage in Jones County. A schoolteacher, Gladys Austin, recalled that the Klan killing so frightened her and her friends that they rarely spoke of it. Other blacks grew more angry and defiant in the wake of the killing. A few days after Dahmer’s death, a white man visited activist Eberta Spinks in Laurel. He strode up her front lawn and sat down on her porch, and warned her, “Mrs. Spinks . . . you know what you're doing? That's what Vernon Dahmer got killed about.” She responded as she often did to white threats: “If anybody bothers me . . . It's going to be blood running down the street like water.” The man left, and as Spinks recalled, he never returned to threaten her again. Blacks viewed Dahmer as a martyr, and they perceived his death as a call to the crusade against racial absolutism. The raging anguish and hatred that spread across the black community, even into the hearts of children, shocked and angered some whites.²⁴

Racial tension percolated as several local white citizens and organizations responded defensively to angry speeches by blacks and the mere discussion of a boycott

²³ First quote, Cheryl Outlaw, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 2, 2008, MOHP recording; second quote Lillie Easton Jackson and Carol Jackson Preyor, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording; third quote Kerry Fielder, interview.

²⁴ Quoting Eberta Spinks, interview by Kim Adams, Spring 1995, MOHP Digital; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009, MOHP recording.

by the NAACP. Most of these whites manifested a complete ignorance of the racial injustice perpetrated by white leaders and citizens in their county and excused the slow pace of change. The owners of WBKH television station claimed that race relations in Hattiesburg were exemplary. Without threats or coercion, Hattiesburg had desegregated public accommodations; higher education institutions were integrated; stores employed black clerks; and the city had hired black police officers. They declared that a boycott would never end because the boycott leaders would never accept the city's concessions. The station owner implored black citizens to show more patience, insisting, "It can't be done overnight, but just look at our record so far." A white citizen, George C. Walker, proved even more insensitive to black suffering when he argued that throughout the years of civil rights activity in Hattiesburg, only one person had died. Walker concluded: "In comparing this record with other areas, I think the people of Hattiesburg and Forrest County should be commended for the way they conducted themselves during this time." Another citizen, J. V. Sanford, mocked the creation of the Dahmer fund and emphasized that the community had never raised such monies for other families who lost their homes to fires and who were financially less fortunate than the Dahmer family. Besides, as investigators had yet to find the perpetrators, whites hardly needed to "ease their conscience" through special aid to one family. She concluded, "How do we know it wasn't civil rights workers who did it to cause trouble? The civil rights workers aren't going to leave us alone anyway, apparently. Since the Negroes have equal rights now, it's about time they started looking out for their own."²⁵

²⁵ First quote WBKH Editorial, January 14, 1966, HMR; second quote George C. Walker, "No Reason For Humiliation," *Hattiesburg American*, January 15, 1966; all

The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce and the local newspaper marred their bold stands in the wake of the Dahmer killing by warping the facts and criticizing the revitalized Movement. *Hattiesburg American* journalist Elliott Chaze accused activists of employing radical language and actions and condemned them for exploiting Dahmer's death. Chaze conceded that the black community had a genuine grievance against the Klan. However, he failed to understand how blacks could link their demands for biracial governance and equal economic opportunities with Dahmer's death. He also tried to disassociate the city from the Dahmer killing by asking why blacks threatened to boycott Hattiesburg merchants when the killing occurred five miles north of Hattiesburg on the border of Jones and Forrest counties and that the "nightriders" likely came from Jones. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce claimed erroneously that Dahmer's murder was an "isolated tragedy" in their town, and even professed that the Hub City leaders had devoted themselves to guaranteeing all persons "their rights and privileges."²⁶

Some white professors and administrators at USM also expressed their consternation with the revitalized Movement in Hattiesburg. A USM political science professor, Christos Leonidas Dumas, who identified himself as a Greek Orthodox immigrant, asserted that although he supported "freedom, tolerance, non-discrimination, and unqualified equality of opportunity," the recent NAACP demands contradicted the "ethical code of what we call American democracy." Citing Plato, he argued that "social justice" required equal opportunity rather than guaranteed success. The NAACP's

other quotes J.V. Sanford, "A Terrible Thing But—" *Hattiesburg American*, January 22, 1966.

²⁶ First quote, Elliot Chaze, "What Would Vernon Dahmer Think of Week's Activities?" *Hattiesburg American*, January 5, 1966; all other quotes, Elliott Chaze, "Push Probe of Fire Bomb," *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966.

demands that the city grant political offices and law enforcement positions to blacks defied the principles of social justice as it favored a group because of their race rather than their merit. He concluded caustically that other minority groups—such as Greek immigrants—could make similar demands, but they “were too busy working productively and paying taxes to demonstrate and agitate.” Claude Fike, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at USM, employed the old red-baiting tactics in his address to the Kiwanis Club. He asserted that communists had used the Movement as a distraction to infiltrate the United States government. He even claimed that “Congress is paralyzed over civil rights which is destined to make a mockery of constitutional law. The president is its victim and slave and the public is too guilt-ridden, too political-minded and too fearful to arouse itself to the mutual peril of how closely related the Negro and Communist revolutions are.”²⁷

These white critics employed the familiar anti-civil rights rhetoric. Their claims that blacks enjoyed equal rights completely ignored reality in 1966: school segregation, black disfranchisement, police brutality, and employment discrimination persisted in Hattiesburg. Many public facilities still refused to serve blacks. Blacks still lacked equal opportunity to rise in their communities precisely because the white racist establishment had denied them political and economic power in the interest of maintaining the white absolutist state. The Klan murdered Dahmer because he had planned to collect poll taxes at his store. Unless blacks acquired positions of power which provided them with the ability to fight racial oppression and allowed them equal opportunity, their plight would

²⁷ Last quote “Racial Strife is Just What Communists Want,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 2, 1966; all other quotes Christos Leonidas Dumas, “If Minorities are to Get Special Favors, the Greeks Have Goals too,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 2, 1966.

never change. The hiring of a few blacks in downtown stores and in the police department served as mere tokenism. These small gestures failed to remedy the vast discrimination and racial injustice that still plagued Forrest County over 18 months after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and 12 years after the *Brown* ruling.²⁸

Furthermore, Forrest County could not claim a history devoid of white supremacist violence. Dahmer's murder proved the logical conclusion to the persistent violence in the county, which had one of the worst lynching records in the state, and which consistently perpetuated racial injustice. After all, in 1946, when a change of venue forced the transfer of the Willie McGee case from Laurel to Hattiesburg, lynch mobs had circled the courthouse and local jurors found McGee guilty of rape despite the lack of evidence against him. In 1959 and 1960, the community, law enforcement, and the courts had engaged in a conspiracy to frame Clyde Kennard to prevent him from desegregating USM. Klansmen in Forrest County klaverns had launched hundreds of violent assaults against activists. Police brutality had always been rampant.²⁹ Hattiesburg had never been a racial utopia, but rather a microcosm of white supremacist Mississippi.

White Hattiesburg ignored these facts and mobilized once again to hide black

²⁸ Ellie Dahmer, speech, Symposium on Civil Rights in Hattiesburg, June 5, 2001, Gonzalez Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, tape-recording, McCain, USM; "Swift Justice," *Delta Ministry Reports*, March 1967, Delta Ministry Vertical File, McCain, USM. Jill Wakeman, "Journey to Mississippi," transcript. Jill Wakeman (Goodman) to Friends, June 25, 1966 and July 8, 1966, both in Jill Wakeman (Goodman) Papers, McCain, USM.

²⁹ Elliott Chaze, "Push Probe of Fire Bomb," *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1966. For examples of violence in Forrest County, see Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 257-282. For examples of police brutality, see, *Alvin Eaton et al. v. The City of Hattiesburg*, Hugh Herring, *Civil Service Commission of the City of Hattiesburg*, Paul Grady, *Hattiesburg City Council* (1972), case no. 724-30, HMR. For McGee case, see chapter two.

oppression behind the façade of racial harmony. To sustain the myth and their white supremacist society, they sought to suppress the revitalized Hattiesburg Movement. On the state level, under the leadership of Governor Johnson, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission spied on activists, and it closely monitored the Dahmer investigation. Blacks despised these investigators; some of them, including Hattiesburg activist James Nix, alleged that the commission had played a role in the attack on Vernon Dahmer. Although there are no available commission records to support Nix's claims, there are substantial records that prove that the commission investigators, who often worked in conjunction with the local Hattiesburg Citizens' Council, began spying on Dahmer at least as early as 1957. After Dahmer's death, the commission kept various records of newspaper articles regarding his murder and the investigation.³⁰

The state also continued its struggle against black suffrage—the right that Dahmer died fighting to achieve. In January 1966, lawyers representing Mississippi and other Deep South states demanded that the U. S. Supreme Court find the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. They claimed that the federal government lacked the authority to abolish literacy and voter qualification tests. Conversely, Attorney General Katzenbach pointed out the racist motive behind the literacy tests, arguing that “the state's failure to give the Negro equal education opportunity [cannot] fairly be used today to disenfranchise him.” Katzenbach further revealed that many illiterate whites had registered in southern states which proved that the South used the test unfairly to prevent black suffrage. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, 250,000 blacks had registered,

³⁰ James Nix, interview by Sarah Rowe; newspaper clipping, MSSC Report, January 22, 1966, SCR, #10-28-0-32-1-1-1; newspaper clippings, January 18, 1966, SCR #6-36-0-55-1-1-1, both at, MDAH.

clearly showing that the bill proved necessary to provide blacks with their constitutional right to vote. On March 7, the segregationists lost the battle when the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act.³¹

Failing to stymie black advancement by dismantling federal protections of civil rights, Mississippi leaders hoped to destroy the Movement through their tired red-baiting propaganda. Representative William M. Colmer and Senator James O. Eastland attempted to tie the MFDP to communism by claiming that some of its members currently belonged to, or at one time belonged to, the Communist Party USA. He used that fact to red-bait the entire Movement. Colmer accused the MFDP of engaging in a series of conspiracies to usurp the American government, most recently in the MFDP Congressional Challenge. Having failed in the endeavor to unseat the regular Democrats, Colmer asserted, the MFDP sought to discredit America's foreign policy by joining the Antiwar Movement and encouraging draft dodging in Freedom Schools. Colmer concluded that the MFDP, SNCC, and their affiliates were "a group of weird and dangerous extremists of the Left bent on dissension, revolution, and national disaster."³²

Certainly the persistence of oppression and Dahmer's murder forced Hattiesburg blacks toward a more radical mindset, but few if any became communists. In fact, the

³¹ Quoting "High Court Upholds 1965 Voting Rights Act," *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1966. "Mississippi, 5 Others Challenge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, 17 January 1966; "Katzenbach Defends 1965 Voting Rights Act," *Hattiesburg American*, 18, January 1966.

³² Quoting William M. Colmer, "Attack on Mississippi is Communist-Inspired," House of Representatives, February 16, 1966, 7, William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Colmer Papers]. "Freedom Democratic Party," Senate Congressional Record, January 19, 1966, 617, William Colmer Papers; "Sen. Eastland Says," *Hattiesburg American*, January 20, 1966; "Colmer Lays it on the Line," *Hattiesburg American*, February 21, 1966.

NAACP, which traditionally used a more moderate approach, had taken the reins of the Movement in the wake of Dahmer's death. Dahmer was one of the local branch's founding members and had served as its president; and many NAACP leaders perceived it as natural that the NAACP should take the lead in the revitalized struggle. NAACP leaders battled with Robert Beech of the Delta Ministry, who hoped to launch direct-action protests and demand broader economic inclusion and power for lower class blacks. The NAACP held marches and mass meetings, but its leaders preferred negotiations to demonstrations and equal opportunity to forced leveling. Ultimately, the NAACP muted, or at least, softened the more revolutionary voices among the black community. Still, whites in Hattiesburg considered the NAACP a radical organization.³³

Racial tensions nearly exploded on January 16, 1966 when locals buried Vernon Dahmer near his burned home. Prior to the service, Evers and Fairley led some 430 black mourners on a solemn march from St. James Church to the Forrest County courthouse. MHP officers parked at intersections across the city and prepared to aid police should problems arise during the procession. However, when whites instigated attacks, they did nothing to protect the black crowds. One officer, James Owen, noticed an intoxicated mourner in the crowd. As Owen rushed to arrest the drunk man, he pushed Evers, Fairly, and two other blacks off the sidewalk with his nightstick. Infuriated by the rude treatment, Evers halted the march and demanded that Chief Hugh Herring impose disciplinary action against Owen. Herring announced that if someone filed a formal complaint, the civil service board would investigate the incident. Soon afterward, as the mourners left for the funeral, an automobile occupied by three young white men careened

³³ Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

into the street grazing one woman marcher and forcing others to rush out of the way. Black protesters rocked the vehicle and yelled at the occupants. When the police forced the crowd out of the street, the driver roared down the street. According to newspaper reports, an officer pursued the fleeing car, but he failed to catch the perpetrators. A report by Mississippi Department of Public Safety administrator Charles Snodgrass to his superiors, however, includes not only a description of the vehicle—a red-and-white '56 Ford, but the full Mississippi license plate number. Yet neither police nor the MHP ever apprehended the driver.³⁴

White assaults failed to deter thousands of blacks from attending Dahmer's funeral at Shady Grove Baptist Church. Many blacks were moved when they noticed four of Dahmer's seven sons in their military uniforms, as the image bespoke volumes of the freedoms the Dahmers had devoted their lives to protect but were denied in their hometown. NAACP President Roy Wilkins expressed great frustration as he pointed out that Dahmer had tried to "help his people take part in what the Constitution says, a government by the consent of the governed. . . . [He] was the kind of man everyone has told the colored man he should be, responsible and self respecting and now he is dead." The pastor of Mt. Helm Baptist Church in Jackson also reflected the growing rage reverberating through the black community, as he declared, "Afflictions have always attended the progress of the cause of right and justice. The fires of persecution have cast their dismal shadows across the centuries, but thank God the voice from heaven says God sees it all and one day will set us free. We know how dark it has been in this community

³⁴ Charles Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong, A. D. Morgan, January 17, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; Elliott Chaze, "Officers Satisfied," *Hattiesburg American*, January 14, 1966; James Bonney, "Negroes Ask," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January, 17, 1966; W. F. Minor, "Rights Leader Buried," *Times Picayune*, January 16, 1966.

this week. Without the Bible and the church, I do not know what we would have done. Kill ourselves I think or a number of people about us.”³⁵

Local blacks had no intentions of waiting for God to set them free. They expected immediate justice on earth. The incident with Officer Owen became an important symbol of the persistent oppression blacks fought against in Forrest County. Between January 17 and 24, activists held five meetings at St. James Church at which leaders established three major goals—the dismissal of Owen, the mass registration of black voters, and the city’s compliance with the NAACP’s grievance list. Toward those ends, Fairley filed a complaint against Officer Owens with the civil service board; the NAACP persisted in protests to pressure the city to comply with its demands; and several groups worked on voter registration drives. The white establishment became increasingly concerned about the growth of the second phase of the Hattiesburg Movement because the protests remained a constant feature of the city. In late January, Investigator A. L. Hopkins contended that black protest was spiraling out of control: “It is obvious that the death of Vernon Dahmer played into the hands of these civil rights groups who were looking for a chance to participate in demonstrations and create trouble in general. It is further obvious that the Negroes in Hattiesburg are becoming bolder and much more dangerous than they have been in the past.”³⁶

³⁵ Quoting W. F. Minor, “Rights Leader Buried,” *The Times Picayune*, January 16, 1966. Charles Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong, A. D. Morgan, January 17, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; Elliott Chaze, “Officers Satisfied,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 14, 1966; James Bonney, “Negroes Ask,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January, 17, 1966.

³⁶ Quoting A. L. Hopkins, MSSC Report, January 20, 1966, SCR, #2-64-1-94-1-1-1, MDAH. MSSC Reports, January 17 and 18, 1966, SCR # 2-64-1-94-1-1-1, MDAH. MDPS Memos and Reports Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; Elliott Chaze, “Officials Likely to Meet with Negroes This Week,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 17, 1966;

Indeed, Hattiesburg's many black activists had changed over the years. The murder of Dahmer wounded them deeply, but it enraged rather than destroyed them. It radicalized many of the older activists, who quickly became impatient with the slow pace of change, and it birthed passionate fury in young people. The activists often disagreed on how to utilize best the collective anguish and rage with many freedom fighters calling for the people to focus it into peaceful but determined political protests while others harnessed their anger and gradually moved in a more violent direction. The response to Dahmer's murder certainly revitalized the Movement in Hattiesburg, but it also created the first signs of deep internal fissures. The second great rebellion against white supremacy had begun with anguishing intensity and remained a steady force for change throughout the winter of 1966. The protests forced city leaders to enter into negotiations with activists. In February 1966, the Hattiesburg Board of Commissioners created a Human Relations Committee with 20 members appointed by the mayor for the purpose of creating harmonious relations between the races. To the chagrin of Robert Beech of the Delta Ministry, the NAACP terminated protests as they negotiated with the city fathers. The divide between the two organizations deepened, and in March, Fairley asked Beech to find new office space for the Delta Ministry as he was no longer welcome to rent space in his shop. The NAACP also had strained relations with the MFDP. Still, the civil rights activists sustained a fairly united front against the city fathers that spring as they struggled to force the patriarchs to meet their demands.³⁷

Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, and attached reports January 18, 20, 21, 25, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

³⁷ Ken Dean to Mayor Paul Grady, February 1, 1966, HMR; Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators*, 63.

Activists in Jones County also sought to force the white patriarchs to terminate the exclusions and oppressions of Jim Crow, most tangibly through the courts. Several blacks and whites who were arrested after an attempted sit-in a year earlier at the Town House Hotel and Coffee Shop—better known as the Pinehurst—launched a federal suit against the owner Paul Swartzfager. On January 25, Swartzfager testified that the protesters kept demanding service without stating what items they wished the waiter to serve them. Swartzfager described the group as dirty, poorly dressed, and “exuding a foul odor.” He contended that the restaurant had previously denied service to whites because they had failed to dress properly and that he and his employees never discriminated against customers based on race. After the mixed group neglected to order, he had them “served” with warrants.³⁸

Nearly four months later, on April 15, 1966, Judge Dan M. Russell ruled that “defendants and those acting in concert are permanently enjoined from depriving plaintiffs of their constitutional rights,” a decision that seemed to reinforce the legitimacy of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in Mississippi. However, a little over six months later, on December 15, 1966, Judge Russell refused to hear a case regarding the desegregation of Laurel swimming pools. The Department of Justice claimed that the segregated pools violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Upon receiving notice of the suit, the city attorney William Deavours pledged that the Laurel City Water Commissioner C. A. Massey would “keep foremost in his mind that which is good and wholesome for the children of Laurel.” The story disappeared from the newspapers soon after the plaintiffs filed the lawsuit. On December 15, 1966, Judge Russell dismissed the complaint by claiming it

³⁸ “Hearing Ends: Judge Studies Laurel Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 26, 1966.

lacked merit.³⁹ Blacks in Hattiesburg worried that their local courts would also fail to deliver justice. Through persistent protest, they determined to keep the spotlight on Hattiesburg in hopes that the publicity would ultimately force Forrest County to bring the Klan killers to justice.

The black revolt against injustice in the Central Piney Woods paralleled the FBI's struggle to destroy the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan through the DABURN investigation, but FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover determined to distance the FBI's war against the Klan from the Civil Rights Movement. When delivering his annual message to all FBI personnel in late January 1966, Hoover made clear that the DABURN investigation would focus on finding the killers, not on promoting racial equality. He contended that law enforcement could not assume responsibility for sociopolitical conditions that contributed to "unrest, civil disobedience, and violence." Rather, the agency served as a force to maintain law and order in the event of such disturbances. Despite the FBI's continued efforts to distance itself from the black freedom struggle, a successful war against the Klan had the potential to help liberate the black race. For without the threat of violence, the white supremacist establishment would find it more difficult to silence black protest. The DABURN investigation became a pivotal struggle in the war against white supremacy, particularly because Special Agent in Charge Roy

³⁹ First quote *Elberta Spinks et al. v. The Travel Inn Motel and Pinehurst Coffee Shop* (1965-1966), case no. 1956-CIV (H) (C), *US District Court Southern District of Mississippi Docket Book*, U. S. District Court, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; second quote "Pool Suit Defendants Get Papers," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 28, 1966. *The United States v. The City of Laurel, Mississippi, Curtis A. Massey, City Water Commissioner, Cecil Williams, Director Laurel Municipal Swimming Pools* (1966), case no. 2054-CIV, *US District Court Southern District of Mississippi Docket Book*, U. S. District Court, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Moore devoted himself to the destruction of Bowers and his White Knights.⁴⁰

Outraged over the Dahmer murder, Moore moved the center of his anti-Klan operations into the Central Piney Woods. He was determined to use whatever means necessary to bring every conspirator to justice. Expecting total devotion from his army of agents, he worked them six days a week from sunup to midnight and half days on Sundays. Through evidence, informant reports, and interviews, agents soon compiled a list of 38 Klansmen who they theorized knew about or participated in the Dahmer attack. Moore, along with one of his lead men in Hattiesburg, John T. Kelly, assigned agents to each of these Klansmen and ordered them to unearth incriminating evidence against the suspects assigned to them. As agents swarmed around the suspects, they employed the COINTELPRO tactics that they had used in the Neshoba case to elicit information and cultivate more informants. Agents tailed Klansmen, interrogated them, and interviewed their relatives, friends, associates, acquaintances and enemies. They conducted background checks on their personal lives and gathered intelligence through other Klansmen. When agents found evidence that could incriminate a suspect in the DABURN case or in any criminal case, they threatened to use it unless the Klansman cooperated. Agents also found battered wives and girlfriends along with white male victims of Klan violence strewn all across Jones County. Agents exploited the fears and rage of the battered white women and the white male victims of Klan assaults and encouraged many of them to provide agents with incriminating evidence against their abusers. The FBI also used divide and conquer strategies by gathering intelligence from Klan informants and then leaking that information to DABURN suspects. Agents hoped

⁴⁰ Quoting Ralph Hays, "FBI Chief Gives Sage Advice," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 31, 1966. "Killed by the Klan"; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 29, 72, 85-86.

that one of these Klansmen would worry that his brothers had turned on him and would testify against him in court, or he would become terrified that his brothers would think he was an informant and execute him. To preserve himself, he might decide to cast his lot with the FBI.⁴¹

While the agents struggled to penetrate klaverns in the Central Piney Woods, Bowers employed several strategies to confound the FBI's investigation. He ordered Klansmen to refrain from providing agents with their alibis on the night of the Dahmer attack. If all Klansmen followed such a strategy, Bowers' theorized, the FBI could never narrow down the list of suspects. Bowers also planned to disperse the FBI's resources by ordering a multitude of Klan attacks. While the FBI investigated one Klan crime, White Knights in another part of the state would launch a new attack. Klansmen would repeat this cycle causing a wide dispersal of FBI agents and a strain on their resources. Bowers also ordered Klansmen to provide the FBI with false information. Certainly, such a strategy would make it difficult for the FBI to uncover the truth because defense attorneys could use such inconsistencies to discredit witnesses should the state or the Department of Justice prosecute Klansmen.⁴²

⁴¹ FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 2, #44-1512-126, SAC Jackson to Director, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 1, #44-1512-20; John T. Kelly to SAC, Jackson, March 7, 1966, Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-128, all in Helfrich Papers. The DABURN FBI files show a pattern of the agents' constant surveillance and attempted interviews as they sought to cull information and to turn Klansmen against each other. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 29, 72, 85-95; "Killed by the Klan"; Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 71-72.

⁴² FBI Report, January 13, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 2, #44-1512-126; SAC Jackson to Director, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 1, #44-1512-20; SAC Jackson to SAC, Memphis, February 1, 1966, DABURN File, vol. 11, # 44-1512-508, all in Helfrich Papers.

The misinformation strategy succeeded in complicating the DABURN investigation as a series of contradictory reports from informants combined with lies and half-truths from suspects during interviews and interrogations rendered it difficult for agents to discern all the participants in the murder. Nevertheless, early in the investigation, agents determined a few vital facts: the Dahmer project originated in Forrest County where the Forrest County Klavern proposed Dahmer's murder. Bowers and Nix approved the killing. Nix assigned the Laurel Klavern leaders to the project. Sessum and DeBoxtel chose several Klansmen to join them on the attack and Giles supplied one of the vehicles. When agents attempted, however, to decipher the identities of the men Sessum and DeBoxtel selected to help them execute the Dahmer project, they found themselves entangled in a web of contradictory reports.⁴³

From the plethora of leads FBI agents acquired, they developed two hypotheses—the six-man theory and the eight-man theory. The six-man theory emerged from reports by Delmar Dennis, a Klan informant from Lauderdale, Mississippi and a close friend of Bowers. According to Dennis, Cecil Sessum, Billy Moss, Pete Martin, Lamar “Shorty” Lowe, Clifton Lowe, and Henry DeBoxtel participated in the dry-run and the attack. During the actual attack, the Klansmen used vehicles belonging to Sessum and Giles for the project. Lamar Lowe lost his gun at the scene, and Clifton Lowe accidentally shot up Giles' automobile, forcing the crew to abandon it. However, other informant reports and interrogations of several suspects supported the eight-man theory. One Klansman informed agents that “for a job like this, eight men would be used; one wheel man, one

⁴³ FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; SAC, Jackson to Director, January 27, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 10, #44-1512-412; SAC, Jackson to Director, January 12, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 1, #44-1512-20, all in Helfrich Papers.

bottle throwing man, and two gun men for each car and two cars to be used.” The eight-man theory placed Cecil Sessum, Charles Clifford Wilson, William Thomas Smith, and Billy Roy Pitts in Wilson’s Pontiac and Henry DeBoxtel, Charles Noble, Lester Thornton, and Frank Lyons in Giles blue Ford. Pitts lost his gun at the scene, and Smith shot out the Ford’s tire. Eventually, the FBI learned the eight man theory was correct, but it took years before agents found the witnesses and evidence to prove it. Bowers’ misinformation campaign stymied the possibility for an immediate arrest. So, in early 1966, agents spread out across the countryside of Jones and Forrest counties as they investigated all the men named in both the six and eight man theories, as well as many other possible conspirators.⁴⁴

As FBI agents swarmed around the Invisible Empire, the agents who hailed from the South used their southern background to gain the trust of Klansmen and solicit a confession. Certainly, some agents considered their southernness a liability. Agent J. L. Martin realized that, “the whites hated you because you were here; the blacks hated you because you weren’t doing enough.” Still many Klan informants only divulged information to agents raised in the South, particularly to those agents who hailed from Mississippi. Because Agent William Dukes was raised in Forrest County and his father had joined the Klan in the 1920s, he understood the concerns and motives of Klansmen. He considered many of them “misguided” poor whites who perceived the Movement as a threat to their status in society. When he approached Klansmen, Dukes used a “down

⁴⁴ Quoting FBI Report, March 5, 1966, 81-82, in FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Melvin “Pete” Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-60, Helfrich Papers. FBI Prosecutive Summary, March 12, 1966, FBI File 44-31694-231 and -589, in Sealed Federal Documents, *State v. Charles Noble*; Billy Roy Pitts, written confession; Summary of Dahmer Incident, n. d., Helfrich Subject Files, all in Helfrich Papers.

home” routine. As he recalled: “You may go in there and sit down and talk with him about the cotton crop, or you may go two or three times before you ever get around to what you want.” Agent Frank Watts, also a native of Forrest County, had an even stronger weapon. His mother Annie Mae grew up in Jones County and knew many of the Klansmen—some were friends and others were relatives. Watts acquired interviews by relying on the “good ole boy routine” and by extending his mother’s greetings to the Klansmen. Another Mississippian, Agent Tom Webb pretended to empathize with Klansman, informing them: “I was brought up just like you were, not to mix with nigras . . . but . . . what the Klan is doing is just bringing on more integration faster than if you ignored the civil rights movement.” Southern white hospitality bred into southerners since birth led many Klansmen to open their doors to their fellow Mississippians. Familiarity with the southern dialect, a shared history, and a seemingly shared perspective on the world could sometimes lure Klansmen to trust, and eventually confess, to the agent.⁴⁵

The punishment for such treason against the Invisible Empire was execution. The Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers wielded the considerable power he possessed to prevent his Klansmen from betraying their brethren. And he would never divulge any of the Klan’s secrets. He was a different sort of southern man. He never married nor had children; he lived with another man behind a fortress; and he rarely invited anyone to his home or attended social events. Agents tailing Bowers acquired few interviews with him and

⁴⁵ First quote, Laura Evans, “Dahmer Case Changed Racial Strife, Ex-FBI Agent Says,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 11, 1990, Dahmer Collection; second, third, and fourth quotes, William F. Dukes, interview by Orley Caudill, January 23, 1973, MOHP Digital; fifth and sixth quotes, Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 89, 92; *Ibid.*, 93-94. Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Case Key in Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991, Dahmer Collection.

culled no significant information from him or his partner, Robert Larson. When Bowers appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee, he refused to answer any questions by invoking his Fifth Amendment rights. He expected the same discipline from his White Knights.⁴⁶

In late January, Bowers ordered all Klansmen in the Central Piney Woods to demand that agents stay off their properties and to refuse to speak with them. Bowers also relied on his connections with prominent white groups to spread his message. Leaflets produced by the Leflore County Bar Association and the Jones County Citizens' Council began to circulate in both Jones and Forrest counties. They advised Mississippians that "a citizen is under no legal obligation at any time to answer any questions asked by any investigator about anything [,] except in a court hearing or at a court-connected proceeding." A citizen could lawfully remain silent when questioned by FBI agents. As a result of the leaflets, agents met mounting resistance to their investigation. To counter Bowers' tactics, Finch and Dukes, along with Jones County prosecutors, Charles Pickering and Chet Dillard, publicly denounced the propaganda as a deliberate attempt to thwart the investigation in the Dahmer case.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ FBI Informant Report, December 29, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 42, #44-1512-3492; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Martin FBI File, vol. 3, #157-5183-173, Richard Corrigan, "Wizard Refuses to Say If Klansmen Took Lives," *The Washington Post*, February 2, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-119, all in Helfrich Papers. Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 35-37; *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1998), case no. 6922, vol. 3, transcript, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

⁴⁷ Quoting Leaflet, "You—And the F.B.I. Lawyers Advise Citizens of Rights," James K. Dukes Collection, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Dukes Collection]. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 90; "Officials Denounce Ku Klux Circulars," *Hattiesburg*

Still, many of the Klansmen heeded Bowers' orders. They resisted talking to the FBI and treated agents with great hostility. When agents sought to interview Mordaunt Hamilton, Sr., the most powerful member of the Forrest County Klavern and a member of the Forrest County Citizens Council, he ordered them off his property. The Klansman had a ferocious temper and was known by employees at his hardware store as a vicious boss who cursed and attacked his employees and shot at people who trespassed on his property. Hamilton certainly harbored hatred and disdain for African Americans. He considered blacks intellectually inferior to whites and perceived the Movement as a conspiracy by northern whites to "mongrelize the whites and blacks," which he believed would decrease "the intelligence of the [southern whites] down to where they could be easier to control." Agents learned from informants that Hamilton had introduced the Dahmer project to Bowers who later assigned the killing to the Laurel Klavern. Ellie and Harold Dahmer informed agents that a few months prior to the attack, Hamilton had stopped by their farm to converse with Vernon Dahmer about his sawmill. Agents deduced that Hamilton was casing the property for the attack. After the murder, the FBI kept Hamilton under constant surveillance, and agents tried unsuccessfully to interview him on numerous occasions.⁴⁸

American, January 25, 1966; "Cooperation Urged," *Hattiesburg American*, February 1, 1966; "Attorneys Hit At Statement," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 26, 1966.

⁴⁸ Quoting M. W. Hamilton, interview by Orley B. Caudill, February 13, 1978, vol. 464, 31-32 MOHP; *Ibid.*, 20-26. FBI Reports February 22, 27, March 7, 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 24, #44-1512-1099, -2000, -2001, -2002, and -2003: FBI Report, March 7, 1966, vol. 31, DABURN FBI File, #44-1512-[?], 72,169; FBI Report, March 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 31, #44-1512-[?], 169; Mordaunt William Hamilton, Sr. summary of investigation, 205-216, FBI Supplemental Investigation Regarding Neighborhood of Dahmer Home, DABURN FBI File, 44-1512-[?], all in, Helfrich Papers. For the Dahmer project's origination in Forrest County, see SAC,

Agents encountered similar resistance from Lester Thornton and Franklin Lyons, who “violently denied participation or any knowledge concerning this incident.”

Although Charles Noble admitted that he had attended a Klan meeting where he had heard some talk about a project planned for “down south,” met several of the Klansmen at John’s Café to discuss the Dahmer project, and participated in a reconnaissance mission of the Dahmer home, he swore that he had never heard of the project again. The FBI tracked down suspects Charles Lamar Lowe and Billy Roy Pitts, who had fled to Houston, but they denied any knowledge of the attack. Lowe ranted that communists had begun taking over America and threatened that if authorities sent him to jail for the Dahmer killing, he would “come out with blood in his eyes for those who took part in sending him to jail.”⁴⁹

Giles subjected agents to similar diatribes. He refused to answer questions about the Dahmer case, but he openly ranted that he hated having “nigger” bosses at Masonite, and he claimed that he would shoot any “nigger” who dared to cross his property. Still, Giles left a trail of battered women and beaten men across Jones County, some of whom

Jackson, to Director, January 14, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 1, #44-1512-29; SAC, Jackson to Assistant Director, n. d., DABURN FBI File, vol. 1, # 44-1512-33A, both in Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 240-241.

⁴⁹ First quote, FBI Report, March 3, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 26, #44-1512-2020; second quote SAC, Jackson to Director, March 24, 1966, vol. 28, DABURN FBI File, #44-1512-2280; third quote, FBI Report, February 3, 1966, Charles Lamar Lowe FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4387-10. FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Lester Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-10; Robert A. Connors to SAC Jackson, January 26, 1966, Charles Lamar Lowe FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4387-5; FBI Report, March 16, 1966, Billy Roy Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-[-?]; FBI Report, February 22, 1966, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-8; FBI Report, February 22, 1966, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-10; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 10, 1966, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-18; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 10, 1966, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-18, all in Helfrich Papers.

possessed incriminating information about the Klansman. Agents interviewed many of them as they sought to find something incriminating against Giles. Cullen Joseph Murphy informed agents that Giles had abducted and beaten him one night for no apparent reason. Murphy considered Giles a violent man capable of killing. Giles also beat his wife, Ruby, and his mistress, Mary Lyons, on numerous occasions. Despite Giles' betrayal and violent treatment of her, Ruby refused to believe that her husband could participate in a Klan murder. Lyons also insisted that Giles could never kill someone even though she admitted that Giles had threatened to kill her and had abused her so severely one night that he fractured her nose. Agents continued to interview both women as they hoped that eventually they might turn against Giles and provide the FBI with information in the Dahmer murder. Early in the investigation, however, Giles maintained powerful control over both women, and he deflected FBI efforts to penetrate his secret Klan life.⁵⁰

Agents encountered even more resistance from 42-year-old Deavours Nix, who ran John's Café in Laurel. Nix informed his fellow Klansmen that "FBI men should be treated just like niggers: don't shake hands with them or let them in your homes." When Agents James Ingram and James Awe approached Nix in front of his residence and informed him that they knew he had planned and approved the Dahmer project, Nix replied, "OK, now you prove it—make your arrests." Nix also berated them for wasting

⁵⁰ First and second quotes, FBI Report, March 1, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, #44-1512-132, 593; third quote, FBI Report, January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, #44-1512-225, both in Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, February 17, 1966, vol. 3 44-1512-132, p. 709; FBI Report, January 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3 #44-1512-132, 696-697; FBI Report, January 22, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, # 44-1512-132, 705-706; FBI Report, January 25, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, #44-1512-132, 644-647, 657-660; FBI Report, February 8, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, # 44-1512-132, 636-638; FBI Report, January 20, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, #44-1512-161; FBI Report, January 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, #44-1512-218, all in Helfrich Papers.

their time on that “nigger,” when they should concentrate their efforts on fighting communism. When the agents suggested that Nix accompany them to the FBI office in Laurel so they could engage in the conversation away from his family, Nix exploded with rage. He yelled at his wife to contact the police and order them to arrest the agents. When police officers arrived, they refused to arrest the agents without an affidavit. Later, Nix signed three affidavits charging the agents with using profanity, shouting, trespassing, and disturbing the peace.⁵¹

Three days later, MHP officers arrested Nix for speeding, violating turn laws, interfering with an officer, and carrying a concealed weapon—a chain jack. At the station, when the officers and Jimmy Dukes tried to fingerprint Nix, he resisted. After a heated argument, Sheriff Bud Gray used physical force to obtain Nix’s fingerprints. Nix became enraged again when Agents Ingram and Awe tried to photograph him and shouted: “you men are fugitives from justice in view of the fact I have filed a complaint at Laurel, Mississippi against you two and there are warrants outstanding for your arrest.” On February 16, Justice of the Peace John Leonard sentenced Nix to 30 days in jail and fined him \$150 for his crimes. Still, Nix continued his attack on agents. In late February, Laurel police tried to arrest an agent on charges made by Nix. Upon orders from Roy Moore, Agent Awe informed Laurel Police Chief L. C. Nix that the FBI perceived the warrants as an effort by local police to obstruct a federal investigation. If it happened again, Awe warned, the FBI would arrest the local officer. Mayor Henry Bucklew, who represented a constituency that despised the FBI agents and considered them tyrants,

⁵¹ First quote Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 241; all other quotes, James Awe to SAC, Jackson, February 11, 1966, Deavours Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-55, Helfrich Papers. Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, February 14, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-55 -56, Helfrich Papers.

implored the agents to submit to an arrest and appear in court where the judge would throw out the complaint and then charge Nix with perjury. When the FBI refused to allow the Klan to use these tactics to interrupt the investigation, Bucklew ordered the police to serve the warrants without arresting the agents. The FBI ignored the warrants.⁵²

Agents refused to allow the Klan or local police to intimidate them and developed methods to combat Klan tactics. When Klansman Norman Lee tried to avoid speaking to agents by threatening to shoot any agent who stepped on his property, Agent Jim Ingram, a formidable man from Oklahoma who stood six feet three inches tall and weighed 230 pounds, along with Agent Awe, drove to Lee's house to interview him. Lee stepped outside wielding a double-barreled shotgun and shouted, "I'm gonna shoot both of you if you don't turn and run." The agents took cover behind large trees on the property, as Ingram calmly informed Lee, "If you raise the barrel of that shotgun, we're armed and you can't kill us both. One of us will have to kill you." The Klansman started to cry. "I don't want any problems, but I have my orders not to be interviewed." Eventually, with the help of Lee's brother, agents convinced Lee to lay down his weapon and meet with them. Although after talking with Lee, the agents concluded that he had not participated in the Dahmer killing, the incident sent a message to the Klan—FBI agents would not be intimidated. Afterwards, agents found it much easier to talk to some Klansmen and to

⁵² Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 9, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-9, Helfrich Papers. Arrest of Deavours Nix, Mississippi Bureau of Identification Case Report, Hattiesburg, Forrest County, February 15, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; "Laurel Resident is Convicted in Absentia Tuesday," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 17, 1966; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, February 17, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; James W. Awe to SAC, Jackson, February 22, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-65, Helfrich Papers.

recruit informants, who had become the heart of the FBI war against the Klan.⁵³

To recruit informants, agents also capitalized on the Klansmen's fear of jail and bodily harm. On January 25, two white men abducted 44-year-old Lawrence Byrd, a suspect in the DABURN case, outside his Radio and TV Service shop in Laurel. They transported him to a swampy area where they along with a "Negro" beat him. As soon as FBI Agents Robert E. Lee and Robert A. Connors heard the story on the news, they visited Byrd in the hospital and tried to solicit information from him. Byrd later claimed that the FBI staged the abduction to coerce a confession from him. The FBI has always denied the charges, and there is no available evidence to the contrary. Regardless, agents used Byrd's fear for their purposes. The attack frightened Byrd, and it seems that the FBI interrogation that followed also terrified him. Agents let Byrd know that they were aware that in 1964, Byrd, a wealthy farmer and businessman, had joined the Klan. After rounds of questioning, Byrd admitted that he had served as the Senator of the White Knights for Jones County, and finally, he conceded that Bowers had ordered the Dahmer killing. Agents continued to visit Byrd over the next few weeks and pried bits of information from him. Agents spread that information to other Klan suspects. When the White Knights realized that someone was talking, Nix, unaware that Byrd was the informant, ordered Byrd to organize an investigating committee and find the leak. Instead, Byrd promised agents he would use the committee to uncover the names of all the conspirators

⁵³ Quoting Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 90-91. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, MDPS Report, January 25, 1966, Mississippi Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

in the Dahmer murder for the FBI.⁵⁴

Agents acquired another break in the case after Laurel police officers Walter Cade and Dan Walters arrested Klansman Melvin Sennett “Pete” Martin for possession of dynamite. When Walters administered a polygraph test to Martin, he showed a positive reaction when questioned about the Dahmer killing. Jones County Prosecutor Charles Pickering charged Martin with possession of dynamite, but the grand jury refused to indict him. Pickering passed on the information to the FBI. Agents John Wallace Wertz and Frank B. Watts followed Martin everywhere. A lift operator with a ninth grade education, Martin was one of the most brutal members of the Jones County Klan. The beefy Klansman had a quick temper and an intimidating presence. He wore his black hair in a crew cut and had a one inch scar on the side of his head. When Martin refused to talk to them, they interviewed his family and his acquaintances. Because Martin was abusive to the women in his life, many of them willingly spoke to agents. His former wife, Zolla Wayne Martin, characterized Martin as mentally unstable; and his daughter revealed to agents that she had overheard her father discussing Klan activities. After Martin’s battered wife left him, Martin stalked his nephew’s fiancée, Sarah Anderson, who informed agents that Martin always carried Klan literature with him, was a close friend of

⁵⁴ FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; FBI Report, January 30, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-142; FBI Report, February 4, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-97; FBI Report, January 31, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-205; FBI Memo, July 10, 1968, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-252; “Merchant Said Robbed and Abducted,” *Jackson Daily News*, January 27, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-90; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, all in Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 239-242; “Testimony Begins” *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1967; “Accuser Accused in Laurel Kidnap Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1967.

Deavours Nix, and likely participated in the Dahmer murder.⁵⁵

Agents used a similar tactic to penetrate Giles' world. After constantly pursuing Mary Lyons, Giles' battered mistress, agents persuaded her to meet them at the federal building in downtown Hattiesburg. During the meeting, as Lyons detailed the brutal attacks she had suffered at Giles' hands, agents received a phone call from a man falsely identifying himself as a lawyer representing Lyons. He demanded to know when the interview would conclude. The contact frightened Lyons because only her sister knew her whereabouts. Afterward, Lyons continued to date Giles and discuss him with the FBI. During one meeting, she revealed to agents that Giles had driven her past an area off Highway 11 to point out the Dahmer residence and the spot where the Klan had abandoned his Ford on the night of the murder. Angry Klansmen stalking Lyons decided to teach her a lesson. In February the Klan burned a cross on Lyons' yard, and later someone tried to break in her home. Soon after, Giles beat Lyons outside John's Café, while he castigated her as a "pimp" for the FBI. The agents learned as much as they could from Lyons, but still they could not crack Giles.⁵⁶ They had better luck with Martin.

⁵⁵ FBI Report, January 27, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-12; FBI Report, February 7, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-35; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-60; John Wallace Wertz to SAC, Jackson, April 1, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-78; Samuel N. Jennings to SAC, Jackson, February 1, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-5; Donald Schlaefer to SAC, Jackson, February 1, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-6; Donald Schlaefer to SAC, Jackson, February 10, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-22; FBI Report, February 16, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-45; Donald Schlaefer to SAC Jackson, January 19, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-3, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁵⁶ Quoting FBI Report, March 21, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 20, #44-1512-2481; FBI Report, January 25, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, # 44-1512-132, 644-647; FBI Report, February 10, 1966, vol. 3, DABURN FBI File, #44-1512-132, 651-653; FBI Report, February 21, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, #44-1512-132, 648; FBI

Martin grew concerned when he learned that the women in his life had cooperated with the FBI, and he worried that other Klansmen might have become informants. Although he did not participate in the actual raid on the Dahmer home, he had participated in the conspiracy. In hopes of currying favor with the FBI, he met with agents and provided them with some peripheral information about the murder. Martin had heard that the Forrest County Klavern had proposed the attack; Bowers ordered it; Nix conducted the investigation of the project; and Byrd approved it. He claimed that Bowers, Nix, and Byrd never participated in actual projects because they knew the FBI kept them under surveillance. An attack on two structures such as Dahmer's home and store, Martin noted, would require eight men; and he speculated that DeBoxtel, Pitts, and Sessum had participated. After intense questioning, Martin also admitted that he and another DABURN suspect, Emanuel Benjamin Moss, aka Billy, had participated in a drive-by shooting of a Negro minister and that Moss, who managed a service station, had provided gasoline to the Klan for the burning of black homes and business. He suggested that Moss might have significant knowledge of the Dahmer project.⁵⁷

When agents approached Billy Moss, a strongly built six-foot balding redhead, he ranted about his hatred of blacks and boasted about his many assaults on African Americans. Moss had a reputation for violence. An acquaintance had witnessed Moss's quick temper on a few occasions, including an incident in which the 53-year-old and his sons started throwing tire tools at one another. His father had committed suicide several

Report, February 22, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 3, 44-1512-132, 649-650, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁵⁷ FBI Non Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5183-60; FBI Report, February 16, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-[?], Helfrich Papers.

years prior to the Dahmer killing, and the tragic loss only intensified Moss' rage. Some acquaintances loosely tied Moss to the Klan. Moss' old boss, William Duckworth, had seen Moss making a whip by connecting a heavy leather strap to an ax handle—a common weapon for Klansmen. Moss also openly received mail from the Citizens Council at work and kept literature on segregation in the station. Although Moss initially refused to speak with agents about the Dahmer case, Agents knew that Byrd and Moss were close friends, and they used Byrd to help them turn Moss.⁵⁸

In early March, Byrd met agents on his farm and provided them with a signed statement in which he implicated himself along with several other Klansmen in the conspiracy phase of the Dahmer killing. On a Thursday night, several weeks before the attack, Bowers had called a special meeting at Bogue Homa Swamp attended by Billy Moss, Charles Lamar “Shorty” Lowe, Pat Lowe, Deavours Nix, Pete Martin, Cecil Sessum, and Henry DeBoxtel. Bowers declared that “something [has] to be done about that Dahmer nigger in Forrest County” whom he characterized as that “big NAACP nigger there.” Bowers complained that the Forrest County Klan had failed to act, and he decided to reassign the project. He requested that any of the men who desired to participate in the project, should meet at J. I. McCarty's Texaco Service Station. Byrd dropped Moss at the station and took Moss' vehicle home. At the next meeting, Sessum volunteered for the Dahmer project.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, Billy Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-39; FBI Report, February 3, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-74; FBI Report, February 3, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-73; FBI Report, February 4, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-71, Helfrich Papers.

⁵⁹ Quoting FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-432, Helfrich Papers. Lawrence Byrd Statement,

Later interviews confirmed Byrd's story. J. I. McCarty recalled that Byrd, Bowers, and several other men arrived at his service station, and he allowed them to leave four vehicles behind. Byrd further validated his confession when he brought Moss to a meeting with agents. In a signed statement, Moss admitted that he had attended the meeting in December at which Bowers solicited volunteers to investigate a "nigger project." Moss also noted that he met several other volunteers at McCarty's Service Station, and that he drove with DeBoxtel to John's Café. Moss decided against participating and took a taxicab to Byrd's home. Neither Byrd nor Moss heard anything else about the project until the radio broadcast of the attack on the Dahmer home early Monday morning. Soon after speaking with Moss, agents tracked down Charles Lamar Lowe, who admitted that he had attended meetings where the Klan discussed the attack, but he insisted that he did not participate in the raid.⁶⁰ The FBI desperately needed someone who had participated in the raid to confess.

Through his Klan investigation committee, Byrd managed to learn the names of some of the participants, including Sessum. He ordered Sessum to meet him deep in the woods to discuss the Dahmer case. During the meeting, Byrd demanded to know who had participated in the attack so he could eliminate the leak. At first, Sessum hesitated

attached to FBI Report, March 7, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-161; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-432, Helfrich Papers.

⁶⁰ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-39, Helfrich Papers. FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-432; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-432; Charles Lamar Lowe to Cecil Sessum, March 21, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 7. #44-1512-1A77; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-39, all in Helfrich Papers.

discussing the project, as he snapped, “My neck is in the noose, and I don’t trust anybody.” Byrd used their friendship to implore Sessum to trust him and help him. Byrd emphasized that his head “was on the block” with Bowers unless he could find the leak. Byrd asked Sessum if Billy Moss participated. Sessum snarled that he would never work with Moss. Finally, after incessant questioning by Byrd, Sessum admitted that Bowers and Nix had ordered the project and that he and DeBoxtel had selected men to execute the orders; but he would only name two of the participants—Billy Roy Pitts and Charles Noble. Pitts lost his pistol outside Dahmer’s house, but he assured Sessum it was untraceable.⁶¹

Henry DeBoxtel also inadvertently confirmed Moss and Byrd’s stories. The burly black-haired Klansmen had earned a reputation in Jones County as a violent drunk. Officers had arrested him several times on charges of assault, creating a disturbance, and public drunkenness. Klan informants described him as an extremist capable of murder. At first, DeBoxtel refused attempts by agents to interview him. Then, one night, when agents approached him at his restaurant, he admitted that he was a Klansman, but he proclaimed, “there’s no law against belonging to the Klan, is there?” After agents approached DeBoxtel several more times, he finally admitted that he had attended a Klan meeting in late December 1965 at which Klansmen discussed a “job” south of Laurel. When agents inquired if Billy Moss had participated, DeBoxtel stated that Moss lacked the “guts” for such a job. He declared, “I wouldn’t trust Moss any further than I could kick that car. . . . If Moss had been involved in that Dahmer Job, y’all would have known about who all

⁶¹ Quoting FBI Report, February 26, 1966, in FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1 #157-854-67; FBI Report, March 3, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-126, all in Helfrich Papers.

was involved a month ago.” When agents asked if Sessum had participated, DeBoxtel only smiled. Later DeBoxtel inferred that Giles’ vehicle was used in the attack and that Sessum had participated in the murder. DeBoxtel became concerned toward the end of the meeting, stating that “if they knew I have said as much as I have, then I would have to carry my gun around for armed protection.”⁶²

Agents knew that they needed a full confession by a conspirator and a participant in the Dahmer case if they were to acquire a conviction. Agents Awe and Ingram shadowed the man who they considered the ring-leader, Cecil Sessum, and persistently asked him about the Dahmer killing. Sessum had a long history of violence and personal struggles. His principal at Ellisville High School remembered him as belonging to a group of “toughs,” who rarely attended school. He dropped out in the ninth grade, married at a young age to his high school sweetheart, Mary, who was only 15 at the time, and found employment as a salesman for Dixie Distributing. Although slight in stature, Sessum had a fierce temper and enjoyed beating civil rights workers, his wife, and children. According to his wife, soon after Sessum became a lay preacher at the Cross Roads Church, he turned into a radical white supremacist and suffered a nervous breakdown. Mary left Cecil in late 1964, but agents tracked her to the Mississippi Coast. She informed agents that Sessum had joined the Klan in April 1963 and that he kept his Klan robe, hood, Klan literature, and a box of dynamite in the top closet in their bedroom.

⁶² Quoting FBI Report, March 1, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-35, 24, 28-29. FBI Report, January 27, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-35, 21; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 9, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, 157-433-35, 4-5; FBI Report, February 14, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-35,57; FBI Report, February 10, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, # 157-433-18; FBI Report, February 14, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-16, FBI Report, March 12, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-52, all in Helfrich Papers.

Sessum had bragged to her that he had led the attack at Brewel Currie's farm during Freedom Summer, even showing her dents in Charles Wilson's vehicle used in the assault.⁶³

Although Mary knew nothing of the Dahmer killing, when Sessum learned of her contact with agents, he worried that her knowledge of his Klan activities might help the FBI arrest him. He began speaking with agents to find out what they knew, which allowed agents to question him. Agents also pressured Byrd to use his relationship with Sessum to turn him into an FBI informant. Byrd delivered the FBI such a gift when he brought Sessum to a late night meeting at his farm with Agents Martin and Dukes. When the agents approached, Byrd begged Sessum to talk. "You're a young man, Cecil. You've got your future before you as well as the future of your children." When Sessum appeared extraordinarily nervous about meeting agents in such an isolated area, the agents persuaded Sessum to accompany them to their Holiday Inn headquarters in Hattiesburg. En route, Sessum observed the Monroe Street exit leading to the Dahmer home and requested that they take him to the graveyard where Dahmer was buried. At the graveyard, Sessum began to cry and declared that he desired to make peace with God. Once they arrived at the Holiday Inn, Agent Martin revealed that Byrd had named

⁶³ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; FBI Report, March 9, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-84; FBI Report, January 19, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 8, #44-1512-145; J. L. Martin to SAC, February 26, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-51; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; all in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 92-94; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 241.

Sessum as a participant in the murder.⁶⁴

Sessum began to talk. His story matched the admissions Byrd and Moss had given to the FBI. Three weeks prior to the Dahmer attack, Bowers held a Klan meeting on Masonite-owned land near the Bogue Homa Swamp northeast of Laurel. Sessum attended along with Nix, DeBoxtel, Byrd, Moss, Lamar and Pat Lowe, and three hooded men serving as guards. Sessum, like Byrd, recalled that Bowers insisted that they must stop Dahmer because he was convincing too many “niggers” to register to vote. At the conclusion of the meeting, Bowers asked for volunteers. Later, at John’s Café, Nix, Bowers, Sessum and DeBoxtel gathered over a map of the Dahmer property in Nix’s office. Nix and Bowers composed sketches of the Dahmer property, and Nix ordered Sessum and DeBoxtel to handpick Klansmen for the project. Sessum, Martin, DeBoxtel, Lamar Lowe, Pat Lowe, Billy Moss, and William Ray Smith participated in a dry-run. At this point in his story, Sessum started crying and acting distressed.⁶⁵

Sessum admitted that on instruction from the Klan, Giles had left his keys in his vehicle and his doors unlocked for the Klansmen to use in the Dahmer project. During the attack, one of the Klansmen accidentally shot up Giles’ car, but Sessum neglected to note the name of the shooter. Sessum willingly confirmed Dukes’ suspicions that Billy Roy

⁶⁴ First quote, Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 246; second quote FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67.

⁶⁵ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, Helfrich Papers. Cecil Sessum, confession, March 2, 1966, in FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as Sessum, confession].

Pitts lost his gun at the scene of the crime. Pitts wanted to return to the property to retrieve it, but the group decided against it. At this point, Sessum refused to speak anymore. Dukes typed out the statement, and Sessum read it in the presence of Dukes, Martin, John T. Kelly and Special Agent in Charge Roy Moore. Sessum verified the veracity of his confession, but then he refused to sign it. Before leaving, Sessum stated that he knew that he had implicated himself in the Dahmer killing, but he declared that he would never testify.⁶⁶

Five days later, after meeting with Bowers, Sessum disavowed his unsigned confession in a sworn affidavit in which he claimed that FBI agents had coerced him into giving a false confession. Sessum claimed that FBI agents abducted him and Byrd. He could not identify the agents by name as he claimed that they flashed their credentials too quickly. They released Byrd, but they took Sessum to a hotel room at the Holiday Inn to meet with Agent Roy Moore. According to Sessum, the agents refused to allow him access to a lawyer and ordered him to sign a confession. When Sessum refused, the U.S. Marshal beat him. Then the agents transported him to the “nigger graveyard” where Dahmer was buried and threatened to kill him and leave his body. Sessum claimed that while he knelt in prayer, the marshal held a gun to his head. When he still refused to confess, agents released him, but threatened to kill him should he utter a word of his abduction.⁶⁷

Sessum chastised the FBI for “picking up white Christians and torturing them in a

⁶⁶ Sessum, confession; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, both in Helfrich Papers.

⁶⁷ Quoting Cecil Sessum affidavit, Dukes Collection. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 247-248; Sessum, confession, Helfrich Papers.

rage of vengeance . . . to appease the nigger mob leaders.” He demanded that the “National Gestapo” leave Mississippi. Sessum had no medical proof that he suffered such a beating. He claimed that he had neglected to seek medical treatment out of fear that a doctor would turn him over to agents. Instead, he locked himself in his home until his wounds healed. He failed, however, to provide a reason why he would think a Mississippi doctor would be involved in a conspiracy with the FBI. Roy Moore responded with his own affidavit. He declared that the FBI never abused or mistreated any of the suspects in the case and that the Klansmen provided voluntary statements after authorities informed them of their rights.⁶⁸

Still, the White Knights launched a massive propaganda campaign that portrayed the federal government as a tyrannical force of communists who had invaded Mississippi to subvert the racial order in the South. They spread their propaganda in the media and through circulars and copies of affidavits that they distributed across the Central Piney Woods. The narratives played upon the fears of many local whites. The Klansmen hoped it would also poison jury pools should they ever face charges in the DABURN case. Nix became the most vociferous Klansman in the propaganda campaign. He released a formal statement to WDAM-TV characterizing the federal government as a “national dictatorship” and local officials as the tools of tyrants who struggled to solicit the black vote and hoped to foment a “racial revolution in Mississippi.” Nix distributed 2,200 copies of an affidavit charging the FBI with harassment and profanity and claiming that the FBI tried to frame law-abiding, decent Laurel citizens. He alleged that agents planted

⁶⁸ Quoting Cecil Sessum affidavit, Dukes Collection. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 247-248; Roy K. Moore, Affidavits, March 10, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 7, #44-1512-1A163, Helfrich Papers.

dynamite in a Laurel citizen's vehicle—referring to Martin. He also contended that Agents Awe and Ingram threatened to harm his wife and three children, but when Nix contacted the police, the officers were too afraid to arrest the agents. Appealing to the Deep South's distrust of the federal government, Nix contended that Laurel was "swarming with a large number of arrogant and violent men in the FBI service," who considered themselves above the law. Nix refused to "remain silent and see our American institution of equal justice under law destroyed without exposing those who work against it, regardless of their position or power." In regards to the DABURN case, Nix stated, "I am very sorry about the bombing of the Da[h]mer nigger," but he claimed he had no knowledge of the case.⁶⁹

Bowers hoped to bolster the lies by bringing wayward Klansmen back into the fold and forcing them to sign similar affidavits. Bowers visited Martin and handed him an affidavit which asserted that Martin had not participated in the Dahmer attack and which accused Detectives Dan Walters and Walter Cade of planting dynamite in his vehicle. Martin took the affidavit, but he never signed it. Bowers also tried to convince Moss to sign an affidavit, but Moss refused unless Byrd signed a similar document. Bowers had become particularly suspicious of Byrd—most likely because Sessum had informed him of Byrd's cooperation with the FBI. Bowers visited Byrd at his shop. Some Klansmen, he told Byrd, had seen him entering FBI Headquarters. That's a lie, Byrd snarled, and he demanded to know the source. When Bowers refused to divulge it, Byrd shouted

⁶⁹ First and second quotes, FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 9, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-9, Helfrich Papers; all other quotes, "This Happened in America Not Russia," Deavours Nix, affidavit, attached to, FBI Report, April 28, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 2, # 157-3484-121, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, February 21, 1966, in Non-Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3484-91, Helfrich Papers.

“[you’re] a liar.” Bowers tried to quiet Byrd as he told him to “take it easy,” and in a stern hushed voice, he warned: “this is just like the Philadelphia case and we will be all right if we sit tight because they can’t prove anything. If you can hold yourself together, everything will be all right.”⁷⁰

Four days later, William Ray Smith and a tall ruddy-faced man entered Byrd’s shop. Byrd noticed that Smith had his hand in his coat pocket and appeared to be clutching a pistol. Smith asked him, “You know me, don’t you Lawrence?” Byrd strode toward his office where he kept a gun. Smith followed him and asked, “How tight are the Feds on you now? Are you getting any sleep?” Once Byrd reached his office, he replied that he simply ignored the agents who visited him. Smith asked him again, “Lawrence, do you know me?” Byrd replied that he appeared familiar and then asked him if he had attended “any night services out yonder” referring to Klan meetings. Laughing, Smith revealed, “Yes, I was sitting right in front of you out at your farm the night it was so cold. I was one of your guards.” Although Smith never overtly threatened Byrd, the encounter frightened him. Byrd informed the FBI of the visits by Smith and Bowers and expressed great fear that the Klan in Jones County had learned of his cooperation with the FBI.⁷¹

Soon after Smith’s visit, Bowers approached Byrd at his shop again and asked him to sign an affidavit that alleged that FBI agents had abducted Byrd, battered and drugged him, and coerced him to sign a statement. The affidavit also claimed that the FBI

⁷⁰ Quoting FBI Report, March 4, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-127; FBI Report, February 16, 1966, in Non Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, 61-67, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-60; FBI Report March 13, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-61, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁷¹ FBI Report, March 8, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-150, Helfrich Papers.

men had forced Byrd to deliver Moss and Sessum to agents who also abused them and coerced them into signing false statements. Byrd refused. The affidavit was full of lies, he shouted at Bowers. The Imperial Wizard warned him that he knew that he and Moss had gone to the FBI headquarters in Hattiesburg, that he had requested to meet Roy Moore, and had even shook the man's hand. Bowers cautioned Byrd that he only had 48 hours to sign the affidavit. Infuriated, Byrd accused Bowers of sending Smith and the ruddy-faced man to his shop to trap him. The next time Bowers sent someone to intimidate him, Byrd warned, he would shoot him. Byrd's intransigence worried the Klan. At the next Laurel Klavern meeting, Sessum laid out a plan to terminate the leaks and protect the DABURN suspects. He insisted that the Klansmen fabricate one common story to tell the FBI in case they were separately interrogated. Sessum demanded that Byrd and Billy Moss be "taken care of," lest they destroy the Klan in Jones County. He ordered all Klan members to make threatening phone calls to the Byrd home.⁷²

Sessums' plan began to work with Moss and several others who began to lose their nerve. During a meeting with Byrd, Moss wept and went "all to pieces." He was terrified that the Klan would kill them both. Hoping to keep Moss talking, Agent Edgar C. Fortenberry visited him at his service station. While they spoke, Bowers and Nix arrived, but they quickly departed once they saw the agent. On March 9, Moss reported to agents that he would refuse to testify in any Klan trial. Two days later, DeBoxtel informed agents that he had been "sick" over all the information he had given the FBI, and determined, "I will just have to stick with the others and risk getting ten years on a

⁷² Quoting Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 248-249. FBI Report, March 10, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-152; Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, March 12, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-440A, both in Helfrich Papers.

conspiracy charge.” He refused to speak with agents again other than to promise them if forced to testify, he would simply state, “Your Honor, I must have been drunk when I told those Agents all of that stuff.”⁷³

The threats by the Klan began wearing on Byrd too. On March 10, Byrd suffered from intense stomach problems and exhaustion and admitted himself to the Laurel General Hospital. Agents Dukes and Martin visited Byrd in the hospital to warn him that the Klan planned to attack him at the upcoming Shrine meeting in Meridian. Byrd assured them that he would not attend the meeting. Dr. E. J. McCraw later diagnosed Byrd as suffering from nervousness that could lead to the development of ulcers. WDAM-TV, as well as a local newspaper, contacted Byrd to inquire if he suffered from a nervous breakdown. Later, Byrd informed the FBI of the contact because he considered it a Klan strategy to discredit him should he testify in the DABURN cases. On March 17, while attending a Mason meeting at the Masonic Temple in Laurel, Byrd received an anonymous phone call from a voice warning him against revealing anything to the grand jury. The following day, Bowers visited Byrd at his store, but before he could threaten him, Byrd accused Bowers of violating the White Knight’s Constitution’s due process clause when he accepted accusations against him in Sessum’s affidavit without providing Byrd with a trial. Bowers responded that he believed Sessum because he was “a good boy who lives a Christian life.” Sessum, Byrd shouted, was a “damn liar,” and he warned Bowers again that he would kill anyone Bowers sent to threaten him. Bowers angrily

⁷³ First quote, FBI Report, March 9, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-151; second quote, FBI Report, March 12, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-52; third quote FBI Report, March 16, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-65; FBI Report, March 10, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-152; FBI Report, March 12, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-59; FBI Report, March 15, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-53, all in Helfrich Papers.

accused Byrd of “making an alliance with Satan and Roy K. Moore by talking to the FBI.” Byrd declared that he had chosen his side, and they would all see who would win in the end.⁷⁴

The FBI thought they could indeed win. By mid-March, Roy Moore considered it time to deliver state and federal indictments, but District Attorney Jimmy Finch refused to move on state charges. Finch claimed that the FBI had not provided him with enough evidence. Undeterred, Moore moved on the federal case. He sent the DABURN summary to the Bureau in Washington D. C. and requested that special agents and Director J. Edgar Hoover review the files to determine if the case was ready for federal prosecution. Moore also made arrangement to use interview rooms at Camp Shelby for interrogations. Moore was certain that when the agents arrested the suspects, law enforcement might break one of them and acquire enough evidence to develop a state prosecution.⁷⁵

In late March 1966, after a 76-day investigation, Hoover approved a mass federal arrest of 14 Klansmen: Sam Bowers, Deavours Nix, Cecil Sessum, Lawrence Byrd, Henry DeBoxtel, Travis Giles, Clifton Lowe, Charles Lowe, Franklin Lyons, Pete Martin, Billy Moss, Charles Noble, Billy Roy Pitts, and William Ray Smith. On March 27, 1966, the federal government indicted the 14 Klansmen for violating a civil rights statute, which prohibits persons from engaging in a conspiracy “to injure, oppress, threaten and intimidate . . . any citizen in the free exercise and enjoyment of any of the

⁷⁴ Quoting FBI Report, March 21, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-159, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, March 17, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-158; William F. Dukes to SAC, Jackson, March 14, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-139; FBI Report, March 14, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-155; FBI Report, March 14, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-158, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁷⁵ Ford O’Neal to A. D. Morgan, March 17, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; A. Rosen to [?] DeLoach, FBI File #44-31694-202, March 11, 1966, Helfrich Papers.

rights or privileges” guaranteed by the United States Constitution; and for violating the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which forbids persons from “threatening or coercing anyone from voting, attempting to vote or urging or aiding others to vote.”⁷⁶

On March 28, 1966, within 70 minutes, agents arrested all of the indicted Klansmen except Bowers who went into hiding. The FBI, MHP Investigators, and Game Wardens coordinated a massive search for Bowers and warned Mississippians that he was “armed and dangerous.” The FBI searched his home where they collected an arsenal of weaponry. Three days later on March 31 at 9:17 a.m., Bowers, flanked by his attorneys, Charles Blackwell and Travis Buckley, surrendered to authorities at the Hattiesburg offices of the FBI. When agents arrested him, Bowers mocked the mass federal search for him; he declared “the only thing I was armed with was the Holy Bible, which the Federal government may consider dangerous.” After the arrests, Attorney General Katzenbach praised the FBI, Mississippi Highway Patrol, and the Forrest County Sheriff’s Office for cooperating in the investigation that led to indictments of all 14 Klansmen. A few days later, Jimmy Finch requested access to the full records on the DABURN case from Department of Justice so that he could begin developing the state’s case.⁷⁷

Within three days of the initial arrests, all 14 Klansmen paid bail and returned to their klavern meetings to plan more violence. Still, Bowers’ brief incarceration before he

⁷⁶ Quoting “14 Charged in Dahmer Slaying,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1966. FBI press release, March 28, 1966, FBI File, vol. 7, #44-31694-262, Helfrich Papers.

⁷⁷ Quoting “Malice Toward Some,” *Newsweek*, April 11, 1966, 39-40, Dahmer Collection. FBI Report, March 19, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-459; FBI Report, March 28, 1966, FBI File #44-31694-262; FBI Report, March 31, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 4, #157-18-482, all in Helfrich Papers. Correspondence Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, March 30, 31, April 4, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 10, all in PBJ Papers.

bonded out disturbed him. He later confided to Nix that “the clank of the jail door closing in back of [me] was a very frightening sound.” Nevertheless, Bowers also believed that he had reason for optimism. His misinformation campaign had led agents to confound the six and eight men theories. Consequently, they failed to arrest three of the participants in the Dahmer attack—Lester Thornton, William Thomas Smith, and Charles Clifford Wilson, and they mistakenly arrested William Ray Smith. Agents also lacked the evidence to arrest W. M. Hamilton. Nevertheless, in just 76 days agents had managed to arrest nearly all the men involved in the conspiracy and five of the eight men who had participated in the attack. Over the next two years, as federal and state authorities persisted in their investigation, determined to force a participant to confess and ensure the successful prosecution of all the Klansmen involved in murdering Vernon Dahmer, they would correct their mistakes. Bowers’ optimism notwithstanding, the Klan wars were beginning to favor the FBI.⁷⁸

The war among the citizenry took more time. The reaction to Dahmer’s murder cracked the fortress of white supremacy, but it would take years before blacks and progressive whites managed to break down the walls of Leviathan and annihilate Jim Crow. The murder drove the FBI to center its war against the Klan in the Central Piney Woods, and consequently, it forced local law enforcement to turn against the violent brotherhood. Certainly, many white citizens had come to consider civil rights murders intolerable, and they quietly supported the arrests. The aid many local whites extended to

⁷⁸ Quoting FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609, Helfrich Papers. SAC, Jackson to Director, February 1, 1968, FBI File, vol. 42, #44-1512-3487, Helfrich Papers. “New Indictments in Dahmer Case, 16 Now Charged With Conspiracy in Firebomb Slaying,” *The Meridian Star*, March 27, 1968.

the Dahmers in their time of grief seemed to offer a promising foundation of interracial good will upon which a more just society could be constructed. There were of course other voices in this Deep South community that still cried, “never,” that would protest the promise of social change to the bitter end. Violent subversives regrouped underground where they plotted murders and bombings while more refined conservative and moderate white supremacists publicly continued the racial fight through political and economic means. The Sovereignty Commission, whose investigators had spied on Vernon Dahmer while he was alive, continued to operate in Hattiesburg, monitoring the Dahmer case and spying on activists involved in the Hattiesburg Movement. Not all white citizens supported the investigation of the murder nor the aid the town offered the Dahmers. Certainly, some radical whites applauded the Klan killing as a means of maintaining black suppression.

Nevertheless, in the spring of 1966 violent white supremacists began to lose their grip on the Central Piney Woods. The white establishment in Forrest County, which had once created a permissive environment for Klan violence, began to turn on the White Knights though it failed to befriend the Movement. Rather, the white patriarchs hoped to remove the federal government from their lands by punishing Klan lawlessness while still maintaining a degree of black exclusion. To their chagrin, Dahmer’s murder also galvanized the Hattiesburg Movement. Because it destroyed the myth of Forrest County’s racial moderation, it revealed that the civil rights activists had always held the high moral ground in the racial war; and it provided blacks a powerful forum to demand the destruction of racial absolutism. Although the Laurel Movement had declined in 1965 and 1966 and Jones County whites remained complacent about the Dahmer killing, Klan

insurrections in Laurel would soon force a shift in racial justice in their county as well. For the next several years, a power struggle ensued for control of the Central Piney Woods between the Klan and the FBI, and the activists and the white patriarchs. The Klan would not retreat, but neither would the FBI; the white patriarchs used more covert and evasive tactics to sustain the racial hierarchy, but their intransigence only fueled racial activism. Inevitably, in 1966 the Central Piney Woods' response was ambivalent, marked as much by continuity as by change. There was no immediate move either in its counties or in the state to reconstruct the unjust social order, but significant developments began flowing from the Klan murder that would ultimately make the Central Piney Woods a more equitable place for all of its citizens.

CHAPTER VIII:

INSURRECTION: BETRAYALS, BOMBS, AND BOYCOTTS

In San Francisco, California they called the summer of 1967 the summer of love. In the Central Piney Woods, Mississippi, it was the summer of rage. In Laurel, Klansmen took over a labor strike at Masonite Corporation and brutalized white and black scabs who crossed the picket lines with beatings in broad daylight and drive-by shootings at night. White youths, under the auspices of Klansmen, initiated a white riot against black teenagers trying to desegregate a whites-only hangout. In Hattiesburg, when the NAACP launched protests against police brutality, racial exclusion from city governing and economic discrimination, Klansmen attacked the NAACP headquarters while city leaders employed nonviolent massive resistance to suppress the struggle. Enraged black youths who came of age in an era of Black Power and admired Huey Newton more than Martin Luther King, Jr. decided the time had come to attack the oppressor: “to hell with nonviolence.” Across the Central Piney Woods, black teenagers congregated on overpasses and hurled rocks and bottles at white-driven vehicles, injuring several of their targets. Even some adults decided nonviolence had failed. They assaulted white rioters and they shot at Sovereignty Commission investigators who spied on their meetings and into the homes of black accommodationists who violated the boycott. Over the long angry summer, the racial war spiraled out of control.¹

¹ Quoting Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on

The insurrections in the summer of 1967 also produced some positive results for the black freedom struggle. Sam Bowers erred tremendously when he ordered his Klansmen to brutalize whites along with blacks who crossed picket lines during the Masonite strike because the attacks ruptured white supremacist solidarity in Jones County. Escalating violence inspired many whites to publicly renounce the Klan and to implore white authorities to restore law and order. In response, moderate leaders, who had long hated the Klan, rose in Jones County to destroy the hooded order. Even Klan sympathizers in city hall, the judiciary, and law enforcement were compelled to abet efforts to dismantle the Invisible Empire. Simultaneously, Bowers began to lose control over his white army. FBI pressure combined with Bowers' mistreatment of his minions instigated an insurrection from within the Invisible Empire. Movement leaders also lost some control over their troops when some of them renounced nonviolent civil disobedience and self-defense in favor of violent frontal assaults against white oppressors and black accommodationists. Although white violence far exceeded the sporadic assaults by blacks, white city fathers exploited its emergence to undermine the Movement and blame racial discord on the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Still, unlike the Klan insurrections that hampered the massive resistance movement, black violence advanced the black freedom struggle. Although it divested the Movement of its absolute high moral ground, attacks on accommodationists forced unanimous compliance with the boycott; and assaults on whites taught white southerners in a language they understood that blacks

multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. "Night Riders Hit 2 Homes," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1967; "Seek Cause of Teenage Race Flair," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 29, 1967; "Police Say Negroes Open Fire on Two Automobiles," *Hattiesburg American*, July 28, 1967; "NAACP President Answers Mayor," *Hattiesburg American*, August 25, 1967; James Nix, interview by Sarah Rowe, March 7, 1993, MOHP Digital.

would fight terror with terror which forced white concessions. The insurrections of 1967 unleashed the rage of the subjugated and intensified the fury of the dying Leviathan—each melee propelling the Central Piney Woods toward the pinnacle battle of the racial war.

Over a year before the violent summer of 1967, federal authorities had perpetuated the permissive atmosphere for Klan violence when they allowed Klansmen arrested in the DABURN case to post bail in the spring of 1966 and return to their klavern meetings to plan future attacks. The Klansmen were sure that local authorities would never indict them on state murder charges, and they were confident that the FBI and the Department of Justice lacked the evidence to convict them. Soon after his release from jail, Deavours Nix told Bowers and Pete Martin: “since we did not go on this project, we cannot be prosecuted for murder and if everybody keeps their mouths shut, they can’t even prove that we had anything to do with the planning of it.” Bowers agreed, “it’s our word against theirs.”²

Nevertheless, the arrest and the intensification of the FBI’s war against the Klan forced Bowers to modify Klan tactics and strategies. Based on his study of guerrilla warfare, Bowers developed a twofold political and paramilitary approach to destroy the black freedom struggle. On the public front, he tried to legitimize the Klan by transforming it into the white supremacist extremist wing of the Democratic Party of Mississippi. In the paramilitary underground, Bowers used a new cell-like structure to sustain his violent war of attrition against Klan enemies. During the summer of 1966,

² Quoting FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain Library and Archives, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers].

Bowers focused much of his effort on trying to politicize the Klan. He ordered Klansmen to pressure politicians to support white supremacist policies through a publicity operation that included incessant telephone calls and letter-writing campaigns, publication of propaganda in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, and distribution of political materials. According to Bowers, many politicians desired Klan support. He even claimed that representatives from Senator James O. Eastland's office had solicited the backing of Bowers by promising him that if he could deliver the vote of the White Knights, Eastland would ensure that the charges against the Klansmen in the Neshoba case were dropped. Bowers also used political tactics to destroy his political enemies, particularly Mayor Henry Bucklew, who had declared a war against the Klan in Laurel. In April 1966, the Laurel District Attorney charged Bucklew with attempted embezzlement for attempting to steal \$816.05 from the city. Bowers ordered his Klansmen to demonstrate their support for the prosecution of Bucklew by attending the October trial. Bowers attended many of the proceedings himself, and when the jury found Bucklew guilty, removed him from office, and fined him, Bowers publicly proclaimed that the Klan deserved credit for the conviction. Bucklew's wife, Fern, served out his term. Neither a champion of civil rights nor the Klan, she had little effect on the racial struggle over the next year.³

In a long-term plan to take over the Democratic Party of Mississippi, Bowers persuaded Klansmen to run for local and state offices. He even dared to set his sights on

³ FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, Helfrich Papers; *State of Mississippi v. Henry Bucklew* (1966), case no. 2884, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 23, 109-110, 395-396, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi. "Indict Mayor on Repair Bill," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 20, 1966; "Bucklew is Fined Loses Mayor Job," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 1966; Dick Tarbutton, "Swan Outlines Program Before Hometown Crowd," *Hattiesburg American*, August 7, 1967.

the governor's office and backed the gubernatorial campaign of honorary Klansman Jimmy Swan, who hailed from Hattiesburg. To garner support for Swan and other Klan candidates, Bowers tried to broaden the Klan's political base. Although he persuaded Klansmen from the rival United Klans of America (UKA) to defect to the White Knights, he knew that to obtain mass white support, he needed to attract segregationists outside of Klan circles. To increase his personal appeal to mainstream white Mississippians, Bowers converted to the Baptist faith, the most popular Christian sect in Mississippi, and he became a member of Hillcrest Baptist Church. He also held recruitment drives on college campuses to attract the youth. Finally, he tried to draw support of the white elite by reestablishing the Laurel Citizens Council. However, most of the attendees at the organizational meeting were Klansmen.⁴

Bowers also sought to curry broad white support while sustaining the loyalty of his minions by working with Elmore D. Greaves' White Christian Protective and Legal Defense Fund (WCPLDF) to sponsor numerous public fund-raising rallies and launch a public relations campaign. During the rallies, the DABURN defendants professed their innocence, and they, along with guest speakers, denounced the FBI agents as demonic communists. Bowers even compared the Klan to early Christians and the FBI to Roman soldiers who persecuted followers of Jesus Christ. Although the rallies only drew around 100 people, many of the attendees donated money to the defense fund, which Bowers promised to distribute equally. Bowers also used collections to purchase a 1961 light blue

⁴ FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 5, 1968, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-319; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009; FBI Report, June 14, 1965, FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-255, all in Helfrich Papers.

Ford Falcon for Giles to replace the vehicle lost in the Dahmer attack. Bowers hoped these actions would sustain the loyalty of his Klansmen and convince others to join.⁵

Bowers still considered violence his most potent weapon to divert FBI attention away from the DABURN case, pacify Klan enemies, and wear down the federal government until it tired of the fight and abandoned blacks as it had during Reconstruction. Because Bowers knew that the FBI had successfully infiltrated his Invisible Empire with informants and hoped to topple the organization by turning minions against Bowers, he decided to decentralize the empire's guerrilla warfare units from the Klan core. To that end, he ordered klaverns outside the FBI radar to form clandestine cells of five to six members whose identities were only known to each other. Each Klan cell became a sovereign entity with the power to determine and execute its own projects. Nix suggested that Klansmen work in even smaller cells. He recommended that klaverns develop a "wrecking crew" in which one or two person(s) executed a project. Because Bowers realized that the FBI was focused on the Laurel Klavern, he implemented a moratorium on all Jones County projects. He brought in a new member—Jesse White—to reorient the Laurel Klavern into a political vehicle that operated in legal enterprises.⁶

⁵ First quote, FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; second quote, SAC, Jackson to Director, May 5, 1966, Henry DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-65; FBI Memo to Edgar C. Fortenberry, March 15, 1966, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-46; SAC, Jackson to Director, April 26, 1966, DeBoxtel FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-63a & 63; all in Helfrich Papers. Elmore D. Greaves, press release, White Christian Protective and Legal Defense Fund, January 28, 1965, A. E. Cox, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Cox Papers and Mitchell, MSU].

⁶ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, January 20, 1967, Nix FBI File, vol. 2, #157-3484-205, Helfrich Papers. FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary,

Bowers' overhaul plans for the Invisible Empire signified a major shift in Klan structure. On the political front, the Klan sustained its traditional pyramid structure in which orders flowed from the Imperial Wizard to state and local leaders and then to the minions. The pyramid structure had the power to sustain Klan unity. Moreover, if it functioned as a political party rather than a terrorist organization, there was no danger of a disgruntled member toppling the organization. Simultaneously, in the underground theater, the militant arm functioned as small, disconnected, and highly secretive cells that planned violent projects. If the federal, state, or local law enforcement infiltrated one cell, only the members of the single cell would be compromised and destroyed. The rest of the cells would survive because members of the compromised cell lacked knowledge of their existence and could not offer law enforcement any information about their identities or criminal activities. The dual structure was ingenious; but future terrorist groups would use it with much greater skill than Bowers. Bowers refused to surrender his absolute control over the White Knights, but instead he remained intimately tied to the most violent secret cells and continued to order hits. He developed secret units trained in marksmanship and demolition, which planned a massive bombing campaign across Mississippi. Bowers even violated his own orders for Jones County klaverns to stand down from terror activities when he suddenly demanded that these klaverns spend the

October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609, Helfrich Papers. For overall shifts in Bowers' strategy, see FBI Report, September 28, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 36, #44-1512-3023; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, March 21, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011, Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, November 29, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-185; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 5, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-319, all in Helfrich Papers. Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

late summer of 1966 attacking blacks, particularly the leaders. He also insisted that the only way to deal with these “niggers” was to assassinate them.⁷

The Laurel klavern project to murder black leaders never materialized because betrayals and FBI infiltration caused a mass defection from the Invisible Empire and because Bowers vacillated between using his Laurel Klavern for violence and politics. His indecisiveness bred apathy in his klaverns. During the summer of 1966, attendance at klavern meetings dropped considerably. Even some of the DABURN defendants stayed away. Charles Noble attended the rallies and a few Klan meetings after his arrest, but by August 1966 Noble stopped attending and soon terminated social relationships with Klansmen. Sessum lambasted deserters like Noble as cowards. In the fall of 1966, klaverns continued to suffer such low meeting attendance that some units ceased to meet. Bowers further incited divisiveness when he reneged on his promises to distribute defense funds equitably. When Bowers and Nix informed several DABURN defendants that the Klan treasury lacked funds to pay their legal fees, disgruntled Klansmen secretly met at Billy Roy Pitts’ upholstery shop where they speculated that Bowers and Nix had absconded with the \$9,000 raised at defense rallies. Before they could discuss how to respond, Nix and Bowers arrived uninvited, and Pitts terminated the meeting. Several Klansmen also became irate with Bowers when he decided to draw wayward Klansmen

⁷ Quoting FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967; Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, both in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 29-30. For information on the use of the cell structures by future terrorists, see, Rand Project Airforce. *Countering the New Terrorism*. (Santa Monica: Rand, 1999), 46-52; Walter Laquer, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Morris Dees, with James Corcoran, *Gathering Storm: America’s Militia Threat* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

back into the fold rather than eliminate them as suggested by Pitts and Sessum.⁸

To reinstate his control over disgruntled members, Bowers sacrificed Charles Lamar Lowe, who he alleged had admitted to Sessum in a letter in March 1966 that he had confessed much of his knowledge of the Dahmer case to the FBI. It appears, however, that Bowers exaggerated the charges against Lowe. The FBI file on Lowe has one report that he cooperated with agents, but his information was mostly peripheral. Moreover, when Lowe returned from Houston in 1966, he remained a Klansmen, and no one accused him of anything. Some informants revealed that Lowe had a falling out with Nix and tried to persuade Pitts to help him burn down Nix's house. Pitts refused. It appears that Bowers learned of the plot against Nix, and he accused Lowe of treason to punish him for his conspiracy to harm Nix. Moreover, as the FBI agents circled, interrogating various members and revealing that they had more knowledge than Bowers had originally thought, Klansmen panicked. Lowe was the perfect sacrifice to teach other informants a lesson and make it appear that Bowers would take a hard line against anyone who violated the Klan oath. Finally, even if Lowe wanted to take revenge out on Bowers by turning to the FBI, he lacked the knowledge necessary to bring down the leader of the Invisible Empire.

⁸ FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, November 29, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-185, Helfrich Papers. FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 5, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-319; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, September 1, 1966, FBI File #157-5385-35 in *State v. Charles Noble: A-F*; Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, August 28, 1966, Byrd FBI File vol. 1, #157-505-207; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, November 29, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-185; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, February 3, 1967, Lester Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-61; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, January 20, 1967, Nix FBI File, vol. 2, #157-3484-205, all in Helfrich Papers.

In late November, Bowers charged Lowe with treason and held his Klan trial at Holloway Feed Mill in Jones County. When Lowe went into hiding that night, the Klan tried him in absentia. Around 30 Klansmen attended the trial, including many DABURN suspects. Pitts testified against his best friend. He affirmed that Lowe had spoken to the FBI in Houston and identified the letter as one written by Lowe. The jury found Lowe guilty and expelled him from the Klan. Pitts later regretted his testimony, for he worried that the Klan would order him to execute his friend. After the trial, the Klan left Lowe alone and seemingly remained unconcerned about him. Klansmen, however, became increasingly concerned about Byrd. They had reason to worry. Byrd continued to cooperate in the DABURN investigation; on February 11 the federal government reinstated its indictments against Bowers and several others and arrested them again.⁹

Undaunted, Bowers activated his underground army in a massive counterassault. On the day of Bowers' release on bond after his second arrest in the DABURN case, under Bowers' orders, Klansman Billy Carr used a car bomb to murder Wharlest Jackson, treasurer of the Natchez NAACP Chapter. On March 7, 1967, a small, secretive Klan cell bombed the Blackwell Real Estate Office in Jackson because it had sold homes to blacks in white neighborhoods. To show his contempt for the DABURN indictments, Bowers even dared to order attacks in Forrest County. He targeted Kenneth L. Bailey, a white man who had recently moved to Hattiesburg after becoming manager at WBKH radio, a

⁹ FBI Report, December 4, 1966, Charles Lamar Lowe FBI File, vol. 2, #157-4387-18; FBI Report, Lowe FBI File, vol. 2, #157-4387-103; FBI Report, November 30, 1966, in FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, March 5, 1968, Sessum FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-319; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary, September 27, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-212; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, all in Helfrich Papers.

position previously held by Klan gubernatorial candidate Jimmy Swan. On March 13, Klansmen hurled explosives onto the front yard of Bailey's home and soon after, called Bailey and warned him to leave Laurel because the Klan did not like outsiders. During FBI questioning, Swan theorized that his political enemies had bombed the Bailey residence to frame him and damage his gubernatorial campaign. Agents considered his story ridiculous, but they never charged Swan or anyone else in the attack. Jones County Klansmen applauded the violence as they believed it would distract the FBI from the DABURN investigation.¹⁰

Still concerned about informants, many of the DABURN defendants demanded that Bowers protect them from prosecution by turning his violent cells against Klansmen who had become FBI informants, particularly Byrd. At one Klavern meeting, Lester Thornton declared that if someone informed the FBI on him, he would likely suffer a long prison sentence, but he warned "woe unto the pimp who caused it." He hinted that Byrd needed the same treatment as the NAACP man in Natchez. Sessum promised, "He is mine; I'll take care of that." DeBoxtel and Sessum considered setting fire to the oil wells on Byrd's farm. Several Laurel Klavern members discussed burning Byrd's home, poisoning his cows, and murdering him. While cutting meat in his restaurant, DeBoxtel

¹⁰ Sam R. Ivy to Charles E. Snodgrass, March 13, 1967; George Saxon and T. P. Naylor, Mississippi Bureau of Identification Case Report, Forrest County, March 13, 1967, both in Ser. II, Subser. 10, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, McCain, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]; Loren C. Brooks to SAC, Jackson, June 14, 1965, Bowers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-18-255. FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, August 9, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 8, #157-18-1152; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786; FBI Report: Bombing Investigations in Mississippi, June 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #158-18-1009; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 7, 1968, Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-96; all in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 12, 46.

jested with his fellow Klansmen that he wished he was cutting up Byrd instead, and he implied that the Klan had a project in the works to eliminate him before he appeared before the grand jury. Sessum promised that the Klan would soon address the Byrd problem.¹¹

Bowers insisted it would be wiser to draw back into the fold Byrd and other Klansmen who had cooperated with the FBI, including Moss and Martin. Only then, could they prevent them from testifying against Klansmen in court. Under Bowers' influence, on April 3, 1966, Pete Martin suddenly stopped cooperating with the FBI. Billy Moss also returned to the fold, apologized to Bowers for giving information to the FBI, and promised to deny that he had ever made such statements. Bowers remained convinced that he could draw Byrd back inside the Invisible Empire as well. He issued a statewide order demanding the cessation of Klan harassment against Byrd and invited him to a defense rally. Bowers knew that he needed Byrd to help him convince white Mississippians that the federal government had created the DABURN conspiracy to bring down the white establishment.¹²

Bowers, however, developed a foolish strategy to prove the federal conspiracy theory: he planned to force an ex-convict, Jack Watkins, to declare on tape that under orders of the FBI, he and Roy Strickland, also a career criminal, had abducted Lawrence

¹¹ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 7, 1968, Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-96, Helfrich Papers. FBI Summary Report, September 27, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-212; SAC, Jackson, FBI Memo, July 10, 1968, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-252, both in Helfrich Papers.

¹² Frank Watts, to SAC, Jackson, May 19, 1966, Martin FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5183-95; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; FBI Report, May 19, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1, #157-505-678, all in Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 246; Jack Thornell, "Two Make Bond," *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1967.

Byrd and beaten him until he signed a false statement in the DABURN case. On the night of March 4, 1967, DABURN defendant Billy Roy Pitts and Klan lawyer Travis Buckley forced Watkins into Buckley's vehicle. Pitts sat beside Watkins in the backseat while Buckley drove across deserted roads and informed Watkins that he expected him to affirm on tape their federal conspiracy story. Watkins refused. Infuriated, Buckley, followed by a Ford Falcon, drove to an isolated clearing and parked. Suddenly, Buckley reached over the seat, held a large knife to Watkins' throat, and warned the ex-con that he "was tired of fooling around" with him. Buckley threatened "to turn [him] over to the other fellows." When Watkins still refused to comply with their demands Pitts struck Watkins. The attack sent a signal to the three men in the Falcon. The men garbed in white hoods and black capes, rushed over to the vehicle, yanked Watkins out of the backseat, and brutally beat him. Pitts ordered Watkins to start begging for his life, but Watkins refused. One of the robed men placed a gun to the back of Watkins's head, while another one, carrying a shovel, began digging Watkins' grave. The man holding the gun claimed it held one bullet and he "snapped" the trigger five or six times. Still, Watkins refused to confess to false charges. Finally, Buckley convinced the others that since Watkins was an ex-convict, he would never report the incident. They transported him back to his home. Before they released him, they warned him to keep quiet.¹³

Watkins disobeyed them. The following day he reported the abduction to MHP Investigator Steven Henderson, and within a day he had provided FBI agents with a statement that identified Billy Roy Pitts and Travis Buckley as two of the perpetrators.

¹³ Quoting, Jack Watkins, statement, March 6, 1967, attached to FBI Airtel, March 10, 1967, Billy Roy Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #157-5512-89, Helfrich Papers. Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 252-253; "Charges Bowers in Kidnapping," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 10, 1967.

On March 9, state authorities arrested Buckley and Pitts and charged them with assorted offenses. Bowers quickly bonded out Buckley and provided him with \$1,200 in attorney fees, but he left Pitts in jail. Pitts convinced friends to bail him out, and he hired an attorney, but he became distraught over Bowers' mistreatment. Why, he wondered, had Bowers rushed to Buckley's aid while he treated him "as if he didn't exist[?]" Briefly, he threatened to tell authorities the truth, but he backed down rather quickly. Despite the disparity in treatment, Pitts remained a loyal Klansman.¹⁴

More determined than ever to propagate the federal conspiracy theory, Bowers coerced Byrd back into the Invisible Empire, and he used him in a propaganda campaign against the FBI. Under Bowers' orders, Byrd signed a series of affidavits claiming that Watkins had kidnapped him on January 25, 1966 and forced him to give false statements in the DABURN investigation. Byrd's narrative bolstered claims in the affidavit Sessum had released a year earlier in which he accused agents of beating him and threatening to kill him until he delivered a false confession. Nix also released an affidavit that featured a photograph of himself with a large bruise on his back; he claimed that during his arrest the previous year Sheriff W. G. Gray gave him the bruise when he beat him in the presence of federal authorities. Nix even filed a \$1 million police brutality lawsuit against the sheriff. Agents later learned that the photographs were taken years earlier after Nix was in an automobile accident. The White Knights distributed copies of these affidavits

¹⁴ Quoting Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 252. Ibid., 253-254. FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 39, #44-1512-3291; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011, *Sam Holloway Bowers, Jr., et al.*, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, March 10, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 1, #152-5512-89, all in Helfrich Papers. Jack Thornell, "Two Make Bond," *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1967; "Accuser Accused in Laurel Kidnap Case," *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1967; "Testimony Begins," *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1967.

across the Central Piney Woods to poison possible jury pools in the DABURN and Watkins cases. District Attorney Donald Cumbest from Pascagoula lambasted the conspiracy accusations: “Watkins is absolutely innocent. He does not know Buckley. He does not know Pitts. The FBI finds that he has nothing to do with the Klan or the [Dahmer] murder. [Buckley and Pitts] just picked him at random.”¹⁵

On March 28, the state tried Buckley on the obstruction of justice charge. Defense attorney Albert Sidney Johnston III called Byrd to the stand and asked him about the night Watkins beat him. To the vexation of the defense and the prosecutor, Byrd gave ambivalent testimony. He stated that two men had kidnapped him, but he claimed that the darkness prevented him from identifying them. Byrd pled the Fifth Amendment when Johnston asked him about the affidavit he had signed. Johnston, trying to save his case, pointed out that Byrd had previously identified Watkins as the man who beat him. Byrd replied, “I don’t recall ever specifically saying that [he] was the man who did it.” When Johnston inquired if the FBI agents ordered him not to identify his assailant, Byrd replied “they have not, sir.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Quoting Jack Thornell, “Two Make Bond,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1967. FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, July 5, 1968, Nix FBI File, vol. 5, #157-2482-455; SAC, Jackson, FBI Memo, July 10, 1968, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-252; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, November 29, 1966, Sessum FBI File vol. 2, #157-854-185; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, February 3, 1967, Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-61; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, July 18, 1966, Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-137; FBI Report, March 31, 1966, Lowe FBI File vol. 1, #157-4387-64; Loren Brooks to SAC, Jackson, April 28, 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 2, #157-3484-121, all in Helfrich Papers. “Testimony Begins” *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1967; “Accuser Accused in Laurel Kidnap Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1967.

¹⁶ Quoting John Lechner, “Declare Mistrial In Buckley Case At Pascagoula,” *The Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald*, March 29, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-126, Helfrich Papers.

The White Knights had better luck with ex-convict Roy Strickland. They bribed him to testify that Investigators Ford O'Neal and Steve Henderson along with FBI Agent William Dukes had promised to drop felony charges against him for auto theft if he abducted Byrd and coerced a confession from him in the Dahmer case; he also claimed that he arranged for Watkins to handle the abduction. Dukes and O'Neal took the stand as rebuttal witnesses and denied Strickland's charges. Watkins' mother also provided rebuttal testimony when she declared that on the night of the alleged abduction of Byrd, her son was at home with her. A little less than a year after Strickland testified, he apologized to Watkins for lying. He explained that he found himself in "a real bind" regarding a Pascagoula conviction; Buckley promised to help him if he provided false testimony. But Strickland's lies had worked to some degree. On March 29, the jury reported it was deadlocked, and Judge L. A. Watts declared a mistrial.¹⁷

The Klansmen still faced kidnapping charges, and they confronted a judicial system and a citizenry that had grown hostile toward them. Klan attorneys Charles Blackwell and Carl Ford desperately tried to stymie the prosecution's case by informing the grand jury of their federal conspiracy theory and slandering District Attorney Cumbest as a puppet of the FBI. Infuriated, Circuit Court Judge Darwin Maples defended federal and state law enforcement and denounced Klansmen as a "national disgrace, a disgrace to the state of Mississippi." He called upon the law-abiding citizens to oppose

¹⁷ FBI Report, March 23, 1967, Martin FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5183-144; FBI Report, June 18, 1968, FBI File, vol. 48, #44-1512-4179; John Lechner, "Declare Mistrial In Buckley Case At Pascagoula," *The Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald*, March 29, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-126, all in Helfrich Papers. Mississippi Highway Patrol Report, Travis Buckley Case (March 28, 1967), case no. 25-2496, Pascagoula, Jackson County, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers, "Judge Declares Mistrial," *Hattiesburg American*, March 29, 1967.

Klansmen wherever they confronted them. The grand jury returned indictments against Buckley and Pitts, both of whom pled innocent to kidnapping charges at their arraignment. Cumbest began preparing for the trial.¹⁸ The three other assailants remained unknown and outside the reach of the law.

The Klan was certainly losing control over the judiciary and law enforcement, and they had begun to lose their grip on the citizenry as well. The White Knights failed to control Watkins through violence and death threats; they failed to coerce Cumbest through slander; and they failed to influence the grand jury with fear mongering. Soon afterward, in May 1967, U.S. District Judge Harold Cox ruled against Nix in his lawsuit against Forrest County Sheriff Gray. Nix, he declared, had failed to offer any evidence to prove police brutality and noted, “I think these officers are entitled to be protected and I think when they meet a character who thinks he is above the law I think they are entitled to lower him to the level of the law I think they can apply the necessary force be it however so severe.”¹⁹ The Klan efforts to sue Sheriff Gray, a local lawman adored by segregationists, proved foolish, for even the racist Judge Harold Cox considered the lawsuit an affront.

The White Knights also evinced signs of self-destruction. On March 29, 1967, Klansmen came for one of their own—Truman Weber Rogers. After joining the Klan in

¹⁸ Quoting John Lechner, “Activities Condemned by Judge,” *The Daily Herald*, April 10, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-109; Robert Lee to SAC, Jackson, April 3, 1967, Martin FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5183-146; “Jones Jury Replies to Leaflets,” *Jackson Daily News*, April 15, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-117; Joanne George, “Arraignment Held for Buckley, Pitts,” *The Mississippi Press*, April 18, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-118, all in Helfrich Papers.

¹⁹ Quoting *Deavours Nix v. W. G. Gray, Ford O’Neil, and J. Y. Thomas* (June 31, 1967), case no. 2102, W. G. Gray Papers, USM. “Judge Blasts Deavours Nix,” *Laurel Leader Call*, May 4, 1967, Nix FBI File, vol. 3, #157-3484-242, Helfrich Papers.

October 1965, Rogers had attended meetings and participated in Klan activities, but he soon lost his affection for the hooded order. Rogers was struggling financially, and the Klan charged membership dues that Rogers considered excessive. Furthermore, Klansmen tried to force him to take part in projects against his will, and they sought to coerce him to testify on the Klan's behalf in cases without explaining to him the context of the case or the possible consequences of testifying. Rogers also suffered from several health problems, which led to the amputation of his leg. On the verge of a mental breakdown, Rogers stopped showing up at Klan meetings and defied Klan orders to participate in projects.²⁰

Bowers violated his own strategy to use Jesse White to suppress violence in the Laurel Klavern when he commanded White, Sessum, and Talmadge "Billy" Carr to punish Rogers for his disobedience. On the night of March 29, White, Carr, and Sessum forced Rogers to take a ride with them. While in the vehicle, Rogers informed the men that he simply wanted out of the Klan. The Klansmen turned down a road, came to a stop, and White directed Sessum and Carr to take Rogers outside. Before anyone could act, Rogers unlocked the door, rolled out, and tried to flee. White shouted, "Shoot him." Rogers heard the sound of gunfire. The force of the bullet knocked him to the ground; as he tried to rise, Carr shot him again. When Rogers attempted to rise for the second time, White ordered, "Shoot him again." Carr fired his gun, but Rogers rolled away barely escaping the bullet. Finally, White asserted, "that's enough, I think you have hit him twice." When Rogers tried to stand, Sessum shoved him on the ground, placed a shotgun

²⁰ Robert Womack to SAC, Jackson, June 12, 1967, Truman Weber Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-33; FBI Report, April 11, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-18, both in Helfrich Papers.

in his face and informed him that if he betrayed them they would complete the mission. The men threw Rogers in the backseat and drove around while trying to figure out the best plan of action. Finally, they dumped Rogers at the Community Hospital in Laurel. As soon as the Klansmen departed, Rogers reported the incident to authorities. About 20 minutes later, Klan attorneys Carl Ford and Charles Blackwell tried to visit him, but Laurel Police prevented their entrance into Rogers' room.²¹

On May 1, 1967, Rogers provided the FBI with a formal statement of the Klan attack and furnished agents with significant information in the DABURN case. He had not participated in the murder, but while attending meetings prior to the killing, he heard Klansmen plan the project. When he attended a meeting after the murder, he heard Sessum state that "they got us, but they don't have enough evidence to convict anyone." In July 1967, the state tried Sessum for the attack on Rogers. Sessum, White, and Carr all testified that they had abducted Rogers as part of a citizens' arrest because Rogers had forfeited a bond Jesse White had posted for him. They also claimed that Rogers pulled a toy gun on them, but because they thought it was real, Carr shot him. On July 21, the judge declared a mistrial when the jury deadlocked.²² Once again, the state had failed to convict a Klansman and freed him to participate in terror campaigns.

²¹ Quoting Robert Womack to SAC, Jackson, June 12, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-33, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, April 1, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-28; FBI Report, April 11, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-18, both in Helfrich Papers. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, March 30, 1967, Ser. II, Subser.10, PBJ Papers.

²² Quoting Robert Womack to SAC, Jackson, June 12, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-33, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, April 1, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-6389-28; SAC, Jackson to Director, July 24, 1967, Rogers FBI File, vol. 3, #157-854-258 to 260, both in Helfrich Papers. *State of Mississippi v. Billy Carr, Jesse White, and Cecil Sessum* (1967-1970), case nos. 1502, 1510, *Covington County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 3, 76, Circuit Court, Collins, Mississippi.

The Klan crimes, indictments, and trials in 1966 and 1967 had an ambivalent impact on the Central Piney Woods as it weakened the Klan in Forrest County, but it briefly strengthened the Invisible Empire in Jones County. In the spring of 1967, *Hattiesburg American* journalist James Bonney declared that under the pressure of federal, state, and local investigations “the Klan’s Mississippi empire is crumbling.” He stressed that Governor Johnson ordered authorities to fire any highway patrolman who joined the Klan. Law enforcement stopped tolerating Klan violence. Fear of FBI infiltration caused mistrust to fester which instigated defections. The loss of membership dues led to financial disaster for the Invisible Empire. Finally, the Klan steadily lost support of Mississippi communities. The Klan had certainly declined in Forrest County. Jones County, however, remained a Klan stronghold despite the 1965 city campaign by Mayor Bucklew and Charles Pickering to destroy the White Knights. According to Pickering, although many prominent Jones Countians opposed the Klan, the hooded order also had many supporters. In the spring and summer of 1967, Bowers and his White Knights exploited that support when a strike broke out at Masonite, and enraged white strikers witnessed their former bosses hiring black scabs to replace them. Bowers and Nix drew many of these angry white men into the Klan by organizing their rage into a campaign against Masonite managers, the black workers who returned to work, and the scabs who took their jobs.²³

The strike began on Friday, April 21, 1967 when employees at Masonite staged a walk-out after management fired an employee without cause. The walk-out violated the

²³ Quoting James Bonney, “Klan’s Mississippi Empire is Crumbling,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1967. Charles Pickering, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), September 7, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 792, 796, 800.

no-strike agreement between the International Woodworkers of America and the plant, but strikers fiercely defended their revolt. The arbitrary firing galvanized them. For years, the workers had suffered under management that required them to complete tasks not required of them by their jobs. Union members endured the criticism of the ubiquitous Masonite agents who shadowed them, scrutinized their work and actions, and threatened to fire them. The rage of the strikers exploded into violence that night when Andrew Goettman, the manager of maintenance and engineering, tried to leave the plant. Strikers attacked Goettman and blackened his eye. Two days later, strikers rushed toward a sedan transporting the general manager of Masonite's Mississippi operations and manager of plant training. The strikers shook the sedan so hard that it rocked; one striker hurled an object through the back window of the vehicle.²⁴

Masonite executives and union leaders fought over the legality of the strike in the courts, but both soon lost control to Sam Bowers' White Knights. On April 23, Judge Shannon Clark ordered strikers to return to work. Two thousand strikers violated the court order, including Jones County Klansmen, most of whom worked at the plant. Nix moved among the strikers serving coffee. That evening, after Judge Clark received a motion from the union supporting the workers, he ruled that employees could continue their strike as long as they conducted it in an orderly fashion. Masonite sued the International Woodworkers of America, AFL-CIO, and Local 5-4333. In early May, the Mississippi Supreme Court issued an injunction against the union and ordered union members to return to work. When the strikes continued, Masonite filed contempt of court

²⁴ "Masonite Files Suit in Federal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 26, 1967; "Plant Shutdown: Union Is Out At Masonite," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 22, 1967; "Blast Damages Masonite Well," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 17, 1967; "Masonite Asks For Injunction," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 24, 1967.

charges against 82 union representatives. Continued appeals mired Jones County in tumult and divisiveness as some employees, particularly blacks, returned to work; many whites remained on strike; and Masonite hired unemployed blacks and white college students to replace white strikers. Bowers considered the strike a perfect opportunity to recruit thousands of strikers into the Klan by exploiting the rage of angry white workers who watched blacks take their jobs.²⁵

As Sam Bowers conspired with Klansmen Nix, V. L. Lee, and Norman Lee to launch a terror campaign against the workers who crossed the picket lines, he turned the Jones County klaverns into a den of the most active terror cells in the underground that summer. Strikers established a beachhead across the street from Masonite. Large groups marched in picket lines, while small groups of “observers” kept surveillance on the plant, noting the identities of strike-breakers and scabs entering the plant. On May 22, 350 whites gathered around Masonite just before 7:00 a.m. and jeered at the 60 blacks who returned to work in violation of the strike. Constable Gerald Martin led hecklers. Klansmen Norman T. Lee, Pete McSwain, and W. J. Gray flattened the tires on the vehicle of a college student worker. When he left the plant, they followed him to a

²⁵ Charles E. Snodgrass, to T. B. Birdsong, A. D. Morgan, April 24, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; “Masonite Asks For Injunction,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 24, 1967; Robert Edward Lee, to SAC, Jackson, August 9, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-78[?], Helfrich Papers; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, March 21, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009, Helfrich Papers; “Officials In Union Order Compliance,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 25, 1967; “Masonite Files Suit In Federal,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 26, 1967; “Go Back To Jobs, High Court Says: Strike Held In Violation,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 2, 1967; “Masonite Acts to End Strike,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 5, 1967; “Take Recess in Contempt,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 11, 1967; “Contempt Suit Is Thrown Out,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 20, 1966; Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son’s Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 135. For overview of strike, see Charles Pickering, interview, 792, 796, 800; Maycie Gore, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording. See also various articles in the *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 1967.

service station, and threatened to whip him if he returned to Masonite. Strikers vandalized other workers' vehicles, too. The attacks quickly escalated into violence when nightriders started shooting into their targets' homes and vehicles.²⁶

Many blacks, like David Seals, a truck driver for Masonite, believed he had little choice but to avoid the strike as he had a wife and son to support. Because his family only had one vehicle, his wife, Cora, a teacher at Idella Washington Junior High, drove him to work through the "ugly strike" everyday. They tried to ignore the men who taunted them, and they tried not to think about the violence that could befall them. Other blacks including Alvin Gore, Sr. had originally joined the strike, though he and his friends abandoned it once the Klan took over. Likely Gore also enraged the Klan because his wife, Maycie, was heavily involved in the Movement. When Masonite mailed registered letters to all employees threatening to fire any worker who continued to strike, Gore, like the majority of black laborers, returned to the plant. Gore carpooled with other black workers because they were safer in large numbers. They drove pickup trucks packed with workers and most of them carried their guns. One evening, whites followed Gore and several other workers home. The black passengers aimed their guns at the vehicle, and the driver sped away.²⁷

²⁶ Quoting "May End Testimony Before End of Week," *Laurel Leader- Call*, June 21, 1967. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, May 22, 1967; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, June 14, 1967; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, May 31, 1967, all in Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers. Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, August 9, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-78[?]; FBI Memo Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, March 21, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009, both in Helfrich Papers. Charles Pickering, interview, 800; Charles Marsh, *The Last Days*, 135.

²⁷ First quote, Cora Wade-Seals, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009; all other quotes, Maycie Gore, interview.

The judiciary sought to contain the violence by restricting the strike. On June 22, Chancellor Shannon Clark dissolved the temporary injunction against the strike; but he also forbade strikers to picket or interfere with workers. Masonite appealed. On July 10, the Mississippi Supreme Court reinstated the temporary injunction against Masonite strikers, which prohibited them from picketing while the case remained under review. State authorities prepared for violence and kept strike leaders under surveillance. When hundreds of Jones Countians, including many Klansmen, flocked to these hearings, MHP officers surrounded the court and noted the names of all Klansmen in attendance. The highway patrol also increased its presence around the plant.²⁸

Undaunted, Klansmen intensified their violent campaign. Between June 29 and July 10, nightriders shot into the homes of dozens of Masonite employees. They did not kill anyone, but they injured several people. During one drive-by shooting, shattered glass cut the face of a long-time Masonite worker. On another occasion, nightriders surrounded the home of Masonite employee Gordon Flemming, shooting into his house 41 times and wounding his wife. Police theorized that the attackers hoped to kill the occupants rather than scare them. Reports of other shootings flooded police stations in Jones and Wayne counties. Klansmen also attacked workers and scabs when they left the plant. When three scabs, including a student from William Carey College, and two Hattiesburg residents left the plant one night, a crowd of around 40 men surrounded their vehicle. One man shattered the back window with a slingshot while others hurled bottles

²⁸ Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, June 14, 22, 23, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; "Six Suffer Injuries in Strike Violence: Attacks Made by Employees," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 28, 1967; "In Strike Case: May End Testimony Before End of Week," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 21, 1967; "Picket Injunction Re-Instated," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 10, 1967.

and rocks at the vehicle. One striker hit a worker with a hose, and another slammed a block of concrete into another worker's shoulder. Two other groups reported similar assaults.²⁹

Klansman also tried to disrupt plant operations by bombing Masonite facilities and transportation into the plant, and by attacking managers and laborers while they were engaged in work on Masonite property. Nightriders dynamited part of the Gulf Mobile and Ohio Railroad Line outside Laurel. They also dynamited a well at Masonite. The attack, however, failed to slow work at the plant. Later, Klansman dynamited the line of the United Gas Company, but the damage only briefly interrupted service and altogether failed to affect Masonite—likely the intended target. On another occasion, Klansmen released tear gas inside the plant and used slingshots to fire metal objects at workers. Klansmen also used a slingshot to fire a ball bearing at a plant manager, Andrew Goettman, while he parked his vehicle in the Masonite lot. The ball bearing broke the window but failed to injure Goettman. Strikers attacked workers during shift changes with eggs and rocks. Nightriders also attacked the plant with cherry bombs, and someone fired shots into Masonite's No. 1 power house. When Masonite executives hired security guards to protect the plant and workers, Klansmen attacked them, even in broad daylight.

At 1:30 p.m. on July 18, a carload of men approached security guards protecting a

²⁹ "Nightriders Bullets Hit Area Woman," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; "Jones DA Makes Evidence Appeal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; "Sheriff Pledges Help In Halting Violence," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; "Laurel Gas Meter Hit by Dynamite Explosion," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; "Judge To Call Grand Juries," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 12, 1967; "Six Suffer Injuries In Strike Violence: Attacks Made by Employees," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 28, 1967; "New Report of Violence," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 1967; "Night Riders Hit 2 Homes," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 1967; "Nightrider Attack Causes Injury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 15, 1967. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, June 14, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 135.

Masonite well, and fired a volley of bullets toward the security vehicle. The guards fired back, but no one was injured.³⁰

The Klansman had made a mistake when they targeted white scabs and white employees along with their black counterparts because their actions mobilized most of the white establishment against Bowers and his henchmen. The violence also forced local, state and federal authorities to intervene and cooperate in their investigations. Mayor Fern Bucklew, the city commissioners, and 50 Laurel civic leaders released a joint statement condemning the violence. At the city's request, highway patrolmen flooded into Laurel. Sheriff Merrill Pickering launched an investigation and increased patrols in several Jones County neighborhoods to terminate nightriding. The FBI joined police and sheriff deputies in the Masonite investigations and focused on Klansmen who terrorized scabs. Jones County District Attorney Chet Dillard and Sheriff Pickering requested help from the community to find the nightriders. Dillard called the Masonite Plant a "virtual war zone." Sheriff Pickering reminded the people that they had the right to defend their homes. Authorities were encouraged when a group of residents of Jones County and neighboring counties formed a Committee of Concern and passed a resolution that condemned the violence surrounding the strike. Judge Lunsford Casey called on the grand jury to investigate night riding violence and indict persons involved in such "cowardly acts." Still, many citizens remained unwilling or too fearful to launch a full-scale assault against the Klan. The grand jury condemned the acts of terror as

³⁰ "Nightriders Bullets Hit Area Woman," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967. "Blast Damages Masonite Well," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 17, 1967; "Dynamite Well At Masonite," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 9, 1967; "United Gas Line Feels Explosion," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; "Masonite Guards Exchange Gunfire with Men in Car," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 18, 1967; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 135-36.

“unscrupulous,” but neglected to return any indictments.³¹ The terror continued.

To blacks, local officers and Masonite seemed more interested in protecting whites than blacks. When black employees fought back as the sheriff had suggested, police targeted them instead of the strikers. At Masonite, Deavours Valentine, a striking employee, hurled a bottle at a black employee, Otis Milsaps, who responded by throwing the bottle back at Valentine. Officers arrested only Milsaps. Even changes that favored blacks were suspect. The decision by Masonite management to hire black scabs in positions once reserved for whites opened opportunities for blacks that once seemed unattainable. Yet the action also exacerbated racial tensions because it further divided workers across racial lines. Several civil rights groups worried that Masonite was using the Klan involvement as a weapon to destroy unionism. In August, a group of African Americans, calling themselves Negro Citizens of Jones County, sent a letter to Mayor Fern Bucklew to demand that police terminate the violence at the plant. The black citizens wondered “why you don’t make these people go home. If you really and truly want to keep Laurel ‘The city Beautiful’ instead of letting it become ‘The City Bloody,’ we are humbly asking you to make the people stay away from the Masonite plant threatening the poor working men.” Mayor Bucklew declined to respond. Nevertheless,

³¹ First quote Marsh, *The Last Days*; all other quotes, “Judge Casey Raps Night Rider Squads,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 25, 1967. Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, May 31, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; “‘Enforce All Laws’ City Hall Demands,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 1967; “Sheriff to Stop Night Riders,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 31, 1967; “Judge To Call Grand Juries,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 12, 1967; “Nightrider Attack Causes Injury,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 15, 1967; “Nightriders Bullets Hit Area Woman,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; “United Gas Line Feels Explosion,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; “Jones DA Makes Evidence Appeal,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; “Sheriff Pledges Help In Halting Violence,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 11, 1967; “Nightrider Attack Causes Injury,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 15, 1967; “Dastardly Act, Lack of Evidence For Indictment,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 1, 1967.

the following day, Chief L. C. Nix and 15 Laurel police wielding shotguns forced a crowd of some 200 “hecklers” away from Masonite. Police also arrested Arnold C. Brady on charges of resisting arrest, refusing to obey an officer, and using public profanity. The Klansmen remained intransigent and escalated their attacks.³²

On August 14 at 11:00 pm, the sounds of rapid gunfire exploded across the quiet plant and startled the guards on watch. Bullets punctured the windows of a security vehicle driven by Robert B. Sparkman. Fragments from the blast wounded his passenger, Sergeant DeFazio. When Sparkman saw a man run out from some underbrush toward Union Hall, he and the sergeant rushed toward a building for cover. Nearby, two guards, Julian Carr and Robert Anthony Billiot, left their posts in the building and searched the grounds to determine the location of the shooters. Moments after Billiot rushed to retrieve his knife and his gun for protection, Carr heard a rapid succession of shots. The plant suddenly became pitch black. The Klansmen had shot out the lights. Carr hit the ground until the shooting stopped. Then he scoured the dark grounds for Billiot. He found him, lying on his back over his lit flashlight, his swollen eyes staring into nowhere, blood pouring from holes in the side of his head. Billiot had only recently returned home after serving a tour of duty in Vietnam with the Green Berets, and now at 23-years-old, he was dead. Sergeant DeFazio shouted to his men that someone had shot Billiot’s “brains all over the place, all over the ground.” He ordered his guards to stand down—he would not

³² First quote; “Mayor Makes Letter Reply,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 11, 1967; second quote “Move Hecklers From Masonite,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 12, 1967. Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, August 9, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-78[?]; “MFDP Looks at Laurel Strike,” *Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party News Letter*, 3 (November 27, 1967): 3, Victoria Gray Adams Collection, USM, [hereinafter cited as Adams Collection].

have another man die on his watch.³³

Many Jones County citizens expressed shock and horror over the attack. District Attorney Dillard called the killing “cold blooded murder.” Mayor Bucklew promised that law enforcement would hunt down the killer, and she thanked Laurel citizens for remaining calm in the face of “Laurel’s greatest crisis.” Jones County was anything but calm that summer. The violence continued the following night when guards reported hearing gunshots at the plant, and someone shot into the pickup truck of a Masonite employee. That same night, Klansman Lavelle Stockman beat Masonite worker W. E. Holder, Sr. Afterward, Stockman warned Holder against returning to work at Masonite. Police arrested Stockman on charges of assault. Less than a month later, authorities arrested Stockman again, this time on a drive-by shooting charge.³⁴

At the end of summer, many of Jones County’s white citizens finally decided that the violence had spiraled out of control. When the grand jury began its new session that August, Judge Casey urged jurors to indict the perpetrators. He noted that Hitler, Stalin, Tito, and Mussolini had risen to power by instilling “fear in every individual until it seemed that every man had lost his will to fight back. The pattern in Jones County is similar to the beginning under these dictators.” Prosecutors presented evidence that

³³ Quoting Odell McRae, “One of Last to See Billiot Alive Testifies,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 11, 1969. Odell McRae, “Says White Got 20,000 for Tape,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 12, 1969; “Kill Masonite Guard, DA Terms It ‘Murder,’” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 14, 1967; “Man is Charged in Beating Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 16, 1967.

³⁴ First quote “Kill Masonite Guard, DA Terms It ‘Murder,’” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 14, 1967; second quote “‘Shocked’ Says Mayor,” *Laurel Leader Call*, August 14, 1967. *State of Mississippi v. Lavelle Stockman* (1967) case no. 3054/3055, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 471-472, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi. “Man is Charged on Beating Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 16, 1967.

attackers had engaged in numerous assaults and batteries, shot into at least 16 homes, and used dynamite in four bombings and one attempted bombing. During an inspection of the Masonite Plant and Union Hall, jurors found 81 bullet markings. The jurors concluded that a state of emergency existed and declared that law enforcement showed a great dereliction of duty in its patrol of Masonite plant on the night of Billiot's murder. Grand juries started handing down indictments in the Masonite cases. The violence at Masonite subsided though the strike continued.³⁵

Still, the grand jury investigation failed to temper Klan violence across the county and the state. On September 9, in Jones County, three hooded men broke into the home of Wallace Logan and held him and his wife at gunpoint, while a man with a hose beat his stepdaughter Vicki Logan—a white woman who worked as a teacher for the Mississippi Child Development Group and taught mostly black children. Desperate to divert law enforcement attention away from the Central Piney Woods, Bowers mobilized against Jewish leaders in Jackson and Meridian. The Imperial Wizard had organized a secret terror cell, which included Thomas Tarrants III from Alabama and a Mississippi school teacher, Kathy Ainsworth, and he ordered them to launch the first of a series of attacks against the Jewish population. On September 18, the cell blew up Jackson's Temple Beth Israel Synagogue. Over the next several months, Bowers ordered the secret cell to plant bombs in the homes of prominent black and Jewish leaders and their places of worship.³⁶

³⁵ Quoting, "Judge Deplores Guard's Murder: Grand Jury Is Charged," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 21, 1967. "Jury Indicts Five on Violence Acts," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 18, 1967; "Grand Jury Report Should Be Studied," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 21, 1967.

³⁶ "Sheriff Investigates Girl Beating Charge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 9, 1967. FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers

These massive attacks enraged blacks across the state. By 1967, black patience with the FBI and local authorities had worn thin, for despite the DABURN indictments, the FBI war against the Klan, and the arsenal of federal legislation, white terrorism had only intensified in the Central Piney Woods. Many blacks decided the time had come to launch violent insurrections of their own against the white supremacist order.

The transformation of the black freedom struggle from passive resistance and self-defense to bellicosity in Mississippi began a year before the summer insurrections of 1967 when a violent assault on a peaceful march ignited black rage. On June 5, 1966, James Meredith—the black student who had integrated the University of Mississippi—launched a March Against Fear from Memphis to Jackson to encourage local blacks to divest themselves of their fear and register to vote. Only a few of Meredith’s friends attended the march, and it received little media attention until the following day when a white supremacist shot Meredith soon after he crossed the Mississippi border. Meredith survived, and his march changed the course of the Mississippi Movement. Powerful leaders from all the major organizations including Martin Luther King, Jr. of SCLC, Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, and Floyd McKissick of CORE, along with leaders from the MFDP, and the Delta Ministry received Meredith’s blessing to continue his march to promote voter registration and protest racial injustice. The national NAACP refused to endorse the march because Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins disagreed with Carmichael’s plans to promote civil disobedience whenever marchers encountered white resistance, and because he opposed the presence of the Deacons of Defense whom SNCC

FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, both in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 29-49, 64.

invited to protect the marchers. The other three leaders brokered compromises, and they restarted Meredith's March.³⁷

For three weeks, as some 10,000 activists marched across Mississippi to protest white supremacist terrorism, they refocused national attention on the Magnolia state. Reporters captured images of white mobs as they beat marchers in Neshoba County and of Mississippi patrolmen as they attacked protestors in Canton. When Governor Paul Johnson, Jr. failed to protect the marchers as promised, he enraged black activists and shocked the nation. Still, Carmichael alarmed white America even more with his angry response to racial injustice. At a Greenwood rally, during the Delta leg of the march, he raised his fist and shouted: "We want black power! . . . Every courthouse in Mississippi ought to be burned tomorrow to get rid of the dirt. . . What do you want?" The crowd of over 600 blacks repeatedly shouted, "Black power!"³⁸

The black power concept had been around since slavery, but its invocation by Carmichael during the massively publicized march instigated a transformation in the national black freedom struggle. In theory and practice, civil rights activists disagreed over the meaning of black power and the means to achieve it. Some leaders of SNCC linked black power with black nationalism, black separatism, and anti-capitalism. They demanded the redistribution of wealth, eradication of slums, termination of white

³⁷ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 389-394; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle, SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991 edition), 207-208.

³⁸ Quoting Dittmer, *Local People*, 396-397; *Ibid.*, 390-402; Carson, *In Struggle*, 208-211; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 318-322.

privilege, and total black control over black communities. SNCC supported black separatism to the point that it soon expelled whites from the organization. The Black Panthers used black power to attack police brutality by arming themselves for self-defense and engaging in pitched street battles with officers. Dr. King and SCLC remained devoted to integration and nonviolence as they interpreted black power as the need for black people to acquire equitable political, judicial, and social power through equal opportunity. The NAACP shunned the concept entirely. Nationwide media outlets ignored the nuances of the various arguments, as well as the causes of black anger. Rather, they branded black power under the broad banner of reverse racism and shifted their focus from critiques of white supremacist violence to sensational exposes that condemned black power as black militancy and black racism. The media's attack sapped American empathy toward the Movement. Moreover, the national spotlight receded from the South and focused instead on battles over the Vietnam War, the Black Panthers, and race riots.³⁹

In Mississippi the white patriarchs capitalized on the negative national press to vilify the Movement. Governor Johnson tried to destroy the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) by maligning it as a corrupt black power organization bent on radicalizing black communities. All the while, Johnson and white politicians used their control over the administration of federal War on Poverty programs to deny or lessen black access to Medicaid and Medicare, Job Corps opportunities, and welfare. The governor also appeared before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee to oppose

³⁹ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 254-256, 318-322, 382-383; Carson, *In Struggle*, 210-211, 215-228; Dittmer, *Local People*, 402. For media shift, see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 398.

the Civil Rights Act (1966), which President Lyndon Baines Johnson had proposed to attack white violence and racial injustice in the wake of Dahmer's murder. On a local level, the *Hattiesburg American* declared that militant black activists chanting "black power" and "white blood" at the Meredith March tried to instigate a violent reaction by whites in order to intensify federal intervention. Blacks had never chanted "white blood," but such lies advanced white supremacist efforts to pillory the struggle. In truth, blacks in the Central Piney Woods and Mississippi at large grappled with black power ideologies as they sought new strategies to break through the wall of white resistance. As of the summer of 1966, whites were still circumventing the 1964 Civil Rights Act in most of Mississippi by turning several public establishments into white-only private clubs, while other whites defied the law by blatantly denying blacks access to public spaces like the library. Hattiesburg city fathers stalled negotiations over the black grievance list and had failed to implement a single demand. In Jones County, Klan violence had escalated.⁴⁰

In response to the Meredith March and the persistence of racial injustice and discrimination, the many organizations still operating in the Central Piney Woods, including CORE, SNCC, the Deacons of Defense, the NAACP, the Delta Ministry, and the MFDP combined traditional civil rights methodologies with various black power strategies. Thirty-one-year-old Robert Beech, the white leader in charge of the Delta

⁴⁰ Quoting "Don't Rise to Militant's Bait," *Hattiesburg American*, June 22, 1966. Ruby Hurley, Annual Report 1966 Southeast Region, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 17, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]. Jill Wakeman, "Journey to Mississippi," transcript; Jill Wakeman (Goodman) to Friends, June 25, 1966 and July 8, 1966, all in Jill Wakeman (Goodman) Papers, McCain, USM [hereinafter cited as Wakeman Papers]; Dittmer, *Local People*, 363-388. Governor Paul Johnson, Jr., press release, October 10, 1966; Statement by Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, n. d., both in Ser. II, Subser. 5, PBJ Papers.

Ministry in Hattiesburg, recruited volunteers to Mississippi to study the status of black civil rights in the state and devise strategies to attack the white supremacist system. In conjunction with the other groups, the Delta Ministry held Freedom Schools and fought against government efforts to deny blacks access to federal programs. Civil rights veterans like Maycie Gore took on the roles of social workers and community organizers to help blacks acquire the federal benefits long denied them. She educated blacks about their rights and prepared them to prove their qualifications for various benefits. When she found that widows had not been receiving their deceased spouses' social security benefits because they lacked birth or death certificates, she took them through graveyards to acquire the necessary proof of the birth and death of their spouses. To ensure that the government complied with the laws, she transported local blacks to various government departments and the courts to help them fill out the copious forms, handle the rude employees who tried to intimidate the applicants, and prove their cases before legal authorities. Through these efforts, Gore and other activists forced state and local authorities to terminate racial discrimination in the distribution of government benefits as they empowered blacks with the knowledge and skills to demand their rights.

Local blacks also combined traditional civil rights and black power ideologies in the political arenas. Activists perceived the ballot box as the gateway to black power, for only when blacks acquired local and state offices could they dismantle Jim Crow and terminate racial injustice. Thus, throughout 1966, blacks focused their activism on voter-registration. By the close of 1966, Mississippi had registered 32.9 percent of eligible black voters. Although an improvement, the state still lagged behind other southern states. Georgia had the second lowest percentage at 47.2 percent. In Mississippi, black

candidates Lawrence Guyot and Reverend Clifton Whitley lost their bid for the U. S. Congress, but voter registration drives led to the election in November 1966 of the first black politician in Mississippi since Reconstruction when voters elected Robert Lee Williams to the Jefferson County School Board. Blacks considered the feat monumental.⁴¹ It was a start, and activists spent the next several decades united in their focus on the black vote as the most significant vehicle to attain black power.

Activists divided over how to address racial injustice and how to protect themselves and their communities from white violence. Throughout 1966 Mississippi and Alabama led the nation in cases of white violence against blacks. The failure of federal, state, and local officials to punish white perpetrators allowed white terrorism to persist. As the Delta Ministry Project pointed out, because of the lack of “swift justice” in the Neshoba case, Bowers roamed free to plan the Dahmer killing some 18 months later. Moreover, had the Forrest County courts punished its most violent Klansman, Mordaunt Hamilton, Sr., once during his five trials on assault charges against civil rights workers, he might not have requested that the Klan murder Dahmer. Even after indictments in the Dahmer case, Bowers and his henchmen were free again to launch terror attacks, and activists understood that any of them could become Klan targets. Many blacks considered the outrage whites had expressed after Dahmer’s murder feigned because Klan violence continued, and by the summer of 1966 not a single white construction company had accepted the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce project to rebuild the Dahmer home. The Delta Ministry and other civil rights groups built it instead. Despite the massive

⁴¹ Jill Wakeman, “Journey to Mississippi,” transcript; Jill Wakeman to Friends, June 23, 1966 & July 8, 1966, both in Wakeman Papers. Ruby Hurley, Annual Report 1966, Southeast Region, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 17, NAACP Papers; Maycie Gore, interview.

presence of FBI agents investigating the DABURN case and pledges by local law enforcement to punish racial assaults, white violence and racial injustice remained rampant. Most activists considered the FBI a “joke,” for agents still neglected to protect civil rights workers even though danger remained omnipresent. When one black activist, Robert Ivey, tried to patronize the Chow House Restaurant, the owner Henry DeBoxtel, an accused suspect in the Dahmer murder, yanked him out of his seat and pummeled him. Ivey, a nonviolent activist, did not fight back. DeBoxtel’s stepfather, also a Klansman, ended the assault when he walked in with his gun, and shot Ivey. Despite copious evidence, an all-white grand jury in Jones County refused to indict the Klansmen on attempted murder charges; and the federal government never charged either Klansmen with violating Ivey’s civil rights.⁴²

Blacks protested these injustices nonviolently. In Laurel, Susie Ruffin planned a demonstration in front of city hall to protest the failure of Jones County authorities to punish Klansmen for shooting Ivey. When no one but Ruffin showed up for the protest that morning, she marched by herself. After several hours, Eberta Spinks and Robert Stenson joined her. Klansmen, including Billy Roy Pitts, Deavours Nix, Edward Cowan, Carl Ford, Jesse White, and B. F. Hinton, circled the marchers in their vehicles and took photographs of them. They also distributed white supremacist literature to the officers monitoring the march. Black activists across the Central Piney Woods protected

⁴² First quote, “Swift Justice,” *Delta Ministry Reports*, newsletter, March 1967, Delta Ministry Vertical File, USM; second quote, Jill Wakeman to Friends, June 25, 1966, Wakeman Papers. Jill Wakeman, “Journey to Mississippi,” transcript; Jill Wakeman to friends, June 23, 1966 & July 8, 1966, transcripts, both in Wakeman Papers. FBI Report, September 28, 1966, DABURN FBI File, vol. 36, #44-1512-3023; Donald A. Schlaefter to SAC, Jackson September 26 1966, Deavours Nix FBI File, vol. 2, #157-3484-172, both in Helfrich Papers.

themselves from Klansmen, just as they always had, by keeping loaded guns in their homes for self-defense. The Deacons of Defense provided armed patrols during civil rights meetings, and they served as armed guards for leaders. Some African Americans, however, wanted to move beyond self-defense and fight violence with violence. Over the next year, activists sustained near unanimous compliance with passive resistance and self-defense, but the mental shift toward armed aggression had begun and heightened over the year as white violence escalated.⁴³

However, in the most dangerous civil rights endeavor, desegregation of white public schools under the Freedom of Choice program, expressions of black militancy were absent. Nothing incurred more white supremacist rage than the *Brown* ruling, and blacks understood that children must devote themselves to nonviolence if they wished to protect themselves and advance school desegregation. Officially, the Freedom of Choice plan designed by Mississippi politicians allowed parents to send their children to either previously all-white or all-black schools. The plan appeared fair and democratic, but in reality it was another massive resistance scheme intended to subvert school desegregation. To hinder the implementation of Freedom of Choice, white leaders used intimidation and created a permissive atmosphere for white harassment and violence against blacks who dared to break the color line in the schools. Under the plan, black principals had to authorize the transfers, and administrators warned them that if substantial transfers led to a loss of students in black schools, the district would have to fire excessive staff and faculty. Moreover, local newspapers published the names of black

⁴³ Donald A. Schlaefter to SAC, Jackson, September 26 1966, Nix FBI File, vol. 2, #157-3484-172, Helfrich Papers; Ruby Hurley, Annual Report 1966, Southeast Region, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 17, NAACP Papers.

applicants and the schools they transferred from, which rendered the children, their families, and the principals vulnerable to attack. Prior to the desegregation of a few Laurel schools, Bowers convened his Jones County klaverns and passed on to his minions a list of the names of all the children who planned to attend the previously all-white schools.⁴⁴

Despite the dangers, between 1965 and 1969, dozens of black children dared to cross the color line in the Central Piney Woods schools. In some instances, the NAACP branches in Jones and Forrest Counties handpicked the students; in others, the children or their parents made the decision. In general, whites opposed the token desegregation of their schools. Civil rights activist Maycie Gore sent her eldest children, Glen and Vivien, to desegregate Stewart M. Jones Junior High, and her youngest child, Alvin Gore, Jr., to Lamar Elementary. On the first day of school, as Glen and several other black boys walked toward Jones Junior High, a vehicle slid up beside them. Several Klansman aimed guns at them, and warned that if they dared enter the white school, they would kill them. The children fled. During the five-year Freedom of Choice program, ordinary white citizens harassed and intimidated black students and their parents more than the Klan. When Maycie Gore attended Parent Teacher Association meetings, she confronted disdain. If she sat next to whites, they rushed to another seat. Many white students

⁴⁴ FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, October 7, 1966, Bowers FBI File, vol. 5, #157-18-609; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, both in Helfrich Papers. For Freedom of Choice Plans in Mississippi see, Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 121-140; Ruby Hurley, 1965 NAACP Annual Report Southeast Region, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 16. For Hattiesburg in particular, see "26 Negroes Choose to Integrate Here," *Hattiesburg American*, September 2, 1965; Robert Beech, "Report and Evaluation, Hattiesburg," Delta Ministry Project, September 1964 - September 1965, Wakeman Papers.

harbored the racist mentality of their parents, and not a few of them terrorized the black students. In Laurel, many white children purposely bumped into the Gore children, and “nigger” slipped easily from the lips of teachers and students. White Laurelites expressed intense hostility toward the black students. Stewart M. Jones Junior High canceled the marching band’s participation in the annual Christmas parade because of threats against band member Glen Gore.⁴⁵

In Hattiesburg, the black children attending I. W. Thames Junior High experienced even more incessant abuse from students, teachers, and administrators. One of the students, 12-year-old Anthony Harris, was already a veteran activist by the eighth grade. During Freedom Days, he was arrested for picketing; he had attended Freedom School; and he and his mother Daisy stayed intimately involved with the Movement. In the fall of 1966, he chose to attend Thames with four other black children because he considered school segregation one of the most powerful bulwarks in the white supremacist state. On the morning of his first day of school, he determined that no matter how poorly whites treated him, he would neither retaliate nor retreat. The white children tested his resolve and that of the other students. On a daily basis, children called them “niggers” and taunted them. One day while Harris walked alone toward his classroom, a white student hocked a mouthful of spit on his pants. A crowd of white students laughed. Humiliated and enraged, Harris fought the urge to hit the boy and give whites an excuse

⁴⁵ Quoting Maycie Gore, interview. Jamie Bunch, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010; Glenda Funchess, interview, by Patricia Boyett, September 23, 2008; Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, all MOHP recordings. Anthony Harris, “A Personal Account of Efforts to End School Segregation in a Southern School System,” *Connexions*, November 17, 2006, <http://cnx.org/content/m14113/latest/> (accessed June 2010) [hereinafter cited as Anthony Harris, “A Personal Account of Efforts to End School Segregation in a Southern System”].

to demonize blacks and propagandize the dangers of integration. Instead, he strode into the restroom, wiped off the spittle, and walked past the children to his class with his head held high. Because Harris and the other black students sustained an unwavering commitment to the passive resistance strategy, they placed the desegregation struggle on a high moral plane.⁴⁶

The following year, a former Freedom Summer student, Glenda Funchess, joined Harris and eight other blacks attending Thames. The mistreatment of the black students intensified in the second year of Freedom of Choice. It took all the strength Funchess could muster to attend Thames because the white “kids basically took on the attitude of their parents. . . zero tolerance.” Each morning, when the black students arrived on campus, “the all-white football team charge[d] into [them] like [they] were on a football field.” When the black students walked the hallways, white students would often shout: “Watch out for that nigger” and then climb on “the wall like you were some kind of snake.” Frequently white boys slapped, punched, and kicked the black girls. No one punished them.⁴⁷

Administrators facilitated the mistreatment by manipulating the schedule of the 10 black students to ensure that each black student was always the only black person in the classroom, isolated and alone. When Funchess first entered her science class, she sat next to a white boy. The teacher looked at her askance and ordered Funchess to sit by herself at a table with no lab partner. When Funchess received an “A” on her Martin Luther King Jr., paper from one of the few nonracist teachers, several students stole the essay and cut

⁴⁶ Anthony Harris, “A Personal Account of Efforts to End School Segregation in a Southern System.”

⁴⁷ Glenda Funchess, interview.

it to pieces. Funchess and the other black students reported the mistreatment, but because most of the white students came from wealthy families, and many of the staff and faculty were hostile toward integration, the administration ignored black complaints. As Funchess recalled, “in addition to trying to maintain our grades, we had to protect our health, [and] make sure we got from behind those walls safely each day.” Funchess knew that she only survived the ordeal without suffering a “breakdown” because of her experiences in Freedom Summer, which had inculcated in her a belief in racial equality and in the righteousness of the civil rights struggle. Still, the mistreatment eventually proved overwhelming for Funchess, and she decided to try Freedom of Choice at Hawkins Junior High the following year.⁴⁸

Since Hawkins Junior High had fewer rich whites, more working class whites, and more black students than Thames, Funchess hoped that the diversity would breed harmony, but she was disappointed. The previous year, the NAACP had already handpicked J. C. Fairley, Jr. to attend Hawkins because he was the son of a veteran NAACP president and already well-versed in the Movement philosophy and strategy. Kenneth Fairley—no relation to J. C.—was forced to attend Hawkins by his father, Isaac Fairley—a career army man who had devoted himself and his family to the Movement no matter where the army sent them. Kenneth and his siblings, Isaac, Jr., Donnie, and Deborah were some of the first children to integrate the schools in Florida. When the Fairleys first arrived in Hattiesburg, Isaac allowed Kenneth to attend the all-black school W. H. Jones Jr. High School. For the first time in a while, Fairley enjoyed the comfort of attending a school where students and teachers treated him as though he belonged, and he

⁴⁸ Glenda Funchess, interview.

quickly made life long friendships with black students who would one day become prominent leaders in Hattiesburg, including Johnny DuPree.⁴⁹

In 1967, however, when Forrest County opened Hawkins Junior High to Freedom of Choice, Isaac Fairley ordered Kenneth to attend. The prospect of leaving the comfort and joy of his insulated black school and his new friends devastated Kenneth. He never shared his disappointment or fears with his father because Isaac Fairley had long before inculcated in his children a sense of responsibility for the liberation and uplift of his race. He often lectured them about the power structure of America, and he spent many nights explaining to them that “as long as . . . someone else is operating from a position of being superior and we’re being the folks whose [sic] inferior . . . the field of play would never be leveled.” Blacks, he insisted, must seize opportunities to break racial barriers and prove the innate racial equality of the races. Freedom of Choice provided his children with that opportunity. Because they faced a racist system, he emphasized that they had to excel above and beyond white children to debunk racial myths. Their success would help blacks “level the field of play.”⁵⁰

The phrase “level the field of play” was Isaac Fairley’s mantra, and it motivated Kenneth during his arduous years as one of the student soldiers of desegregation. When Fairley announced to his woodshop teacher that he planned to build a cabinet with drawers and sliding glass doors for his mother, his teacher insisted that he lacked the talent and finances to create such fine carpentry. With his father’s mantra in his mind, Fairley assured the teacher that he possessed such skills and the financing, and he insisted

⁴⁹ Kenneth Fairley interview, May 8, 2009.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

that he should have the same opportunity as the other students to select his own project. The teacher finally consented. When Fairley completed the cabinet, the teacher conceded that he had built a masterpiece and invited the superintendent and principal to view it. Regrettably, the racism of the teacher and the administrators marred the laurels they bestowed on Fairley because they determined that he lacked intellectual abilities. When Fairley refused to pursue industrial arts rather than academics, he faced a hostile faculty and administration.⁵¹

Undaunted, Fairley, again driven by his desire to “level the field of play,” devoted himself to his studies. One evening, when a white student, Donna Thornton, called Fairley to ask him for help on an assignment, her mother picked up the phone and inquired his name and then asked “are you colored?” When Fairley responded affirmatively, she ordered her daughter to hang up the phone. The following day the principal suspended him for three days. The fear of interracial mixing, particularly between black boys and white girls, still lay at the root of white racism and segregation. Isaac Fairley, however, refused to bend to the bigotry and the mistreatment of his son, and he forced the principal to retract the suspension. In Jones County, the principal at Stewart M. Jones Junior High also faced the wrath of angry black parents when he suspended several black children, including the Gores’ son, for yelling at a teacher. The following day, the Gores and several other parents persuaded the principal to reinstate their children after they explained that the students shouted at the teacher because she had

⁵¹ Ibid.

used the “n” word.⁵² The determination of black families, like the Gores and the Fairleys, forced white principals to accede to some of their demands.

As the school year progressed, some white students began to treat the black students better, particularly because many of the black students debunked myths of black inferiority. A white girl at Jones Junior High told Vivien Gore, “you know you are smart. My Mom said black people was hard to learn. And you made a B and I made a C.” Several white parents whose children attended Lamar Elementary School befriended the Gores, and Alvin, Jr. became fast and life-long friends with their sons. In Hattiesburg, Anthony Harris acquired a reputation as a bright and hard-working student at Thames Junior High, and white students like Billy McGee respected him. Often white students recognized the folly of white supremacy before their teachers and administrators. When Fairley’s history teacher divided the students into separate groups to develop presentations on the Vietnam War, his group of all-whites selected him as their leader. A voracious reader with a fascination for history and journalism, Fairley decided to model their presentation on “CBS News.” Some of the students acted out the role of anchors, while others played field reporters who presented battle reports and human interest stories. When the teacher asked which student had developed the creative concept for the project, the students responded “Kenny did.” She asked, “Kenny, who told you to do it that way?” Fairley remarked, “Well, I watch the news a lot with my father, and I just thought it would be a good way to make a presentation.” Flustered, she called the principal to the classroom. He asked Fairley “which one of these students told you to do

⁵² Quoting Ibid. Maycie Gore, interview.

this?” The adults refused to believe that a black boy could produce anything creative and intelligent.⁵³

At that moment, Fairley realized that it was vital for many whites to ensure that blacks “never received credit for their intelligence. . . . And that kind of flipped a greater light on in me that I understood what my father was trying to tell me: that to level the field of play, we had to be exceptional. We had to show the fact that . . . we were not ignorant, that we were not behind, that we had minds and that we could learn. And that would . . . do more for integration than anything else. . . . From that point on I began challenging everything. If there was a play, I challenged that we ought to be able to participate in the play. So I kind of developed a reputation for . . . always challenging.” Glenda Funchess also began challenging the exclusion and oppression she faced at Hawkins. During her Mississippi history class, Funchess was shocked that the teacher only mentioned blacks during the Civil War and then only as insignificant players whom she referred to as “the niggers.” Funchess raised her hand and declared, “the word is not niggers, it’s Negro, and if you can’t say that, I’m sure you can say black.” Funchess, Harris, and Fairley advanced integration by debunking white supremacist myths of black inferiority, but the rage of white racism in Mississippi was so deeply entrenched that they confronted more racism than acceptance.⁵⁴ Although the black Freedom of Choice students sustained a disciplined devotion to the principles of nonviolence, other black youths responded to white attacks with violent insurrections.

⁵³ First quote, Maycie Gore, interview; second quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, MOHP recording.

⁵⁴ First quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; all other quotes, Glenda Funchess, interview.

In the midst of the Masonite strike, on May 28, 1967, 250 black youths marched to the Burger Chef located in Laurel's KC Bottom determined to acquire service at the whites-only establishment. Despite the Civil Rights Act and the multiple sit-ins over the past few years, the burger joint still refused to allow African Americans inside the restaurant. Blacks considered the Burger Chef "an ugly" place because the white owners dared to cater to whites-only even though their establishment was located in the heart of a black community. Most of the blacks planning the sit-in were not Freedom School children, veteran activists, or volunteers trained in nonviolent protest. And they had not sought backing from any civil rights organization. They were teenagers coming of age in an era of black power, some of them already Vietnam War veterans, who, after fighting in Southeast Asia, refused to suffer as oppressed people in their own nation. They honored Malcolm X over Martin Luther King, Jr. and listened to the Black Panthers rather than the NAACP. They rejected gradual change and as one black youth noted, they refused to allow whites to "beat the shit out of them with no baseball bat" or "come to their houses and burn their homes" without retaliation. They would fight brutality with brutality.⁵⁵

These enraged youths found new black role models in Laurel, particularly Urban Pugh, a Black Muslim, who owned several businesses in the KC Bottom. Even black youths, like Johnny Magee, who had attended Freedom Schools, flocked to hear Pugh preach about black pride and self-defense. To them "it sounded better than letting someone hit you upside the head." They also honored Susie Ruffin, who though part of

⁵⁵ Quoting Larry McGill, interview; Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009, MOHP recording; "Seek Cause of Teenage Race Flair," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 29, 1967; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, May 29, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

the traditional Movement, sold a Nation of Islam newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, to local blacks, and who opened their minds to new philosophies and new forms of protest. Some black youths, including Larry McGill, who had been beaten by Klansmen during a Freedom Summer sit-in, found himself caught between his parents' nonviolent revolution and his older brothers' "black power" ideals. The new emerging attitude would soon lead to a divide between black youths and elders.⁵⁶

When the nearly 200 black teenagers arrived at the Burger Chef, they came in contact with over 300 white youths who considered the joint their hangout. Several white teenagers hurled rocks at the black protestors. The White Knights fueled the attacks as Cecil Sessum ordered the Laurel Klavern to persuade white teenagers to cause trouble at the establishment to prevent its integration. Klansman Pete Martin worked as a manager at the Burger Chef, and many Klansmen regularly patronized the establishment. The black youths refused to leave until policemen rushed to the scene and forced them off the property. Down the road from the Burger Chef, many of the protestors gathered. They decided that if they could not eat inside the Burger Chef, then whites could not enter their neighborhoods. Those who dared would be considered invaders open to attack. They stationed themselves near the main avenue leading to the Burger Chef, and hurled bottles and bricks at white travelers. They perceived themselves as revolutionaries, acting out of righteous rage to protest racial injustice. Whites refused to retreat. They gathered at the Burger Chef where they hurled rocks at black-driven vehicles. As McGill recalled, the white and black teenagers were "two young fiery groups" who like boxers refused to stop

⁵⁶ First quote, Johnny Magee, interview; second quote, Larry McGill, interview. "Seek Cause of Teenage Race Flair," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 29, 1967; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong and A. D. Morgan, May 29, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

until the “bell rings.” Police reported that some 200 people of both races participated in these brawls, but officers only arrested blacks.⁵⁷

The bedlam surrounding the attempted Burger-Chef sit-in reflected the internecine conflicts between nonviolent protest and aggressive confrontation that divided and stymied the Laurel Movement. Many of Laurel’s elder blacks were still accommodationists, who feared challenging the white power structure. Most of the city’s middle-aged blacks continued to embrace nonviolence and believed in the power of the ballot and non-violent protest to bring about change. Many black teenagers as well as young black adults saw themselves as black revolutionaries and argued that they must fight violence with violence if they wished to liberate themselves from white terror and oppression. Throughout 1967, factionalism caused the Laurel struggle to stagnate.⁵⁸

Although some blacks also turned to violence in the Hattiesburg Movement that summer, black leaders curtailed factionalism. By the summer of 1967 the NAACP dominated the Movement. Other major civil rights groups had either shrunk to the point that they lacked much of an impact, disbanded, or retreated from the Central Piney Woods. The NAACP had spent over 17 months haggling with city fathers over the list of grievances that they delivered in the wake of Dahmer’s murder. Blacks were tired of waiting. In July the newly elected president of the Forrest County NAACP, Dr. C. E. Smith, sent a revised list of demands to Mayor Paul Grady, city officials, the Forrest

⁵⁷ Quoting Larry McGill, interview. “Seek Cause of Teenage Race Flair,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 29, 1967; Charles E. Snodgrass to T. B. Birdsong & A. D. Morgan, May 29, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers. FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, November 29, 1966 Sessum FBI File, vol. 2, #157-854-185; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary, January 30, 1967, Martin FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5183-135, both in Helfrich Papers

⁵⁸ Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 360-379; Larry McGill, interview.

County Board of Supervisors, and the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce. Through evasion, manipulation, and lies, the city fathers still avoided compliance. When the NAACP leaders demanded that the city enforce federal desegregation laws in public spaces, the city fathers claimed erroneously that all public establishments had complied with the law. Many public establishments still refused to serve blacks. The white establishment also deflected NAACP demands for the full inclusion of blacks in political, educational, and economical arenas. Although the city fathers claimed that when positions became available on various city and county boards, they would consider black and white candidates based on their merit, they failed to acknowledge the need to ensure black representation on these boards since whites had long used such power to oppress blacks. The city fathers claimed that they lacked the power to enforce school integration or desegregate the Selective Service Board because the school board controlled the schools and the federal government controlled the Selective Service. They also contended that they lacked the power to force the sheriff—an elected official—to hire black deputies or force private companies to hire black employees. Blacks knew, however, that the city fathers had the power to influence actions of the sheriff, the Selective Service Board, and private companies; and they could pressure school boards to desegregate and help the federal government with integration cases.⁵⁹

The grievance concerning police brutality became the most controversial issue, as

⁵⁹ Forrest County NAACP to the Mayor, Hattiesburg City and Forrest County Officials, and the Chamber of Commerce, n. d., Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as HMR]; City of Hattiesburg, Forrest County Board of Supervisors, and Chamber of Commerce to Dr. C. E. Smith, July 17, 1967, HMR, [hereinafter cited as NAACP to Mayor et. al. and Hattiesburg to Dr. C. E. Smith, July 17, 1967, HMR]; Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 64-65.

blacks become increasingly disturbed over its persistence and frustrated over the city's denial of its existence. Blacks in Hattiesburg had long struggled to stop police brutality. Although by 1967 the police force had hired several black officers, including Willie McGilvery and Robert Miller, these officers joined their white colleagues in abusing the black community. The Hattiesburg Police Department (HPD) had purposely chosen blacks that they knew they could use to control the black population violently. According to black activist James Nix, Mayor Paul Grady "wanted the largest dumbest blacks he could find . . . to keep the other blacks down." Blacks wanted the city to dismiss black officers McGilvery and Miller and white officer James Owens, all of whom they accused of police brutality. The NAACP demanded that the HPD hire more black officers and integrate black police on an equal level with their white counterparts. The city fathers dismissed the NAACP complaint and even professed that "with the help of people of all races and stations in life this progressive city has always lived under and shown respect for the rule of law."⁶⁰

Blacks disagreed profoundly, and they prepared to launch a massive protest. On July 18, the NAACP held a rally at Saint James Church at which Smith announced that "the answers given by the power structure are no answers at all. . . . Their reaction was the type you can expect from city officials." Smith declared that they had given city fathers and county leaders 17 months to comply with the demands, but they had failed to implement a single request. Now the NAACP would act by using the power of the purse. Smith pointed out that blacks comprised 30 percent of the patrons in downtown stores

⁶⁰ First quote James Nix, interview; last quote, Hattiesburg to Dr. C. E. Smith, July 17, 1967, HMR; Daisy Harris, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

and 90 percent of the passengers riding city buses, and yet these businesses only employed a minuscule percentage of blacks. The NAACP would launch a boycott of the city buses and white owned stores, effective July 19, and continue until the city fulfilled all of the demands. Smith beseeched all blacks in Forrest County to honor the boycott. The audience responded jubilantly, and the NAACP kicked off its boycott with a march on city hall.⁶¹

To the thrill of NAACP leaders and blacks throughout Forrest County, on the morning following the march, busses passed through town devoid of black passengers. Although a few blacks shopped at downtown stores in the morning, by the afternoon black patronage had ended. Small groups of black “lookouts” patrolled the boycotted area and asked the few black patrons emerging from stores that morning to return the merchandise. By the third day of the boycott, black business in Hattiesburg stores had fallen from 30 to one percent, and by the second day at noon, the city’s 16 busses had shut down their services because the loss of business prevented the company from covering its expenses. By using carpools and black taxis, blacks maintained full compliance with the bus boycott over the next two months. Black cab drivers cut their fees from 50 to 25 cents when they transported groups of passengers. White women also aided the boycott, though inadvertently, when they transported their black domestics to and from their homes. Nearly the entire black community showed its support of the summer boycott as even blacks who had never marched in a protest or tried to vote, honored it, and hundreds of people routinely joined the NAACP’s nightly rallies. Still, a

⁶¹ “Federal Court Hearing,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 7, 1967; Leland Cole, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, July 19, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers, [hereinafter cited as MSSC Report]; Winfred Moncrief, “Negroes Begin Local Boycott; Shatter Bus Windows, 3 Hurt,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1967.

smattering of African Americans violated the boycott which threatened its success and concerned many activists.⁶²

Although the black insurrection was mostly nonviolent and certainly less violent than white-on-black violent confrontation elsewhere in the Central Piney Woods that summer, some blacks, enraged by persistent white oppression, initiated attacks against whites that shocked, angered, and terrified the white community. According to James Nix, since the murder of Vernon Dahmer, most blacks “hated white people.” By 1967 African Americans had grown tired of false promises and lies from the city fathers that kept them out of power and ensured their continued exclusion. They knew the city fathers controlled Hattiesburg and could enforce compliance with all the black demands. Instead, they sustained the racial status quo which deepened black rage. After the march on city hall, for the first time in the Hattiesburg Movement, black activists initiated violence against whites when several blacks hurled bottles at white-driven vehicles. When a bottle broke the windows of a Greyhound bus occupied by some 15 white teenage girls, a chaperone and one of the girls were injured. Policemen never found the assailants. Instead, they arrested three blacks participating in the passive resistance march on charges of “ridiculing an officer, interfering with an officer and carrying a concealed weapon.” The following night, a black person shattered the glass storefronts of five

⁶² Quoting “Negroes Begin Local Bus Boycott: Shatter Bus Windows, 3 Hurt,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1967; “Dr. Smith Says City Must Dismiss Three Policemen,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 21, 1967; “Negro Boycott in Second Day,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1967; Leland E. Cole, Jr., MSSC Report, July 27, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers; Chief H. W. Herring, statement, July 24, 1967, HMR.

white-owned businesses located in predominantly black neighborhoods.⁶³

Some activists also employed violence against the smattering of blacks who violated the boycott and consequently threatened its success. James Nix, who had provided protection for NAACP leaders since Dahmer's murder, decided the Hattiesburg Movement needed to become more militant to succeed. Toward that end, he recruited 12 friends and formed the Spirit—a secret organization created to enforce universal black compliance with the boycott and to protect black leaders, picketers, and Movement meetings. Spirit members, through anonymous calls and letters, threatened blacks who broke the boycott, and if such persons remained intransigent, they attacked their property—shooting out the windows of their homes or vandalizing their vehicles. Nix called the group the Spirit because, like a spirit, it forced its will on its targets without ever being seen. The Spirit also protected civil rights activities, mass meetings, and black neighborhoods by providing armed patrols and standing guard over the homes and offices of leaders like J. C. Fairley, Dr. Smith, and Reverend J. C. Killingsworth because they had all received death threats. On several occasions, guards went on the offensive against whites and shot at vehicles occupied by whites that passed through their neighborhoods because they suspected they were Klansmen targeting black homes.⁶⁴

Several of the newer civil rights leaders in Forrest County, including Reverend J. C. Killingsworth and Father Peter Quinn, also intensified the shift toward greater militancy in the Hattiesburg Movement. Killingsworth, a Methodist preacher, became a

⁶³ First quote, James Nix, interview; second quote, “Negroes Begin Local Boycott; Shatter Bus Windows, 3 Hurt,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1967. “Negro Boycott in Second Day,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1967; Leland E. Cole, Jr., MSSC Report, July 27, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 9, PBJ Papers.

⁶⁴ James Nix, interview.

prominent civil rights activist in Clarke County, Mississippi, some 70 miles northeast of Hattiesburg. By the time the Methodist Church sent him to pastor Bentley Methodist Church in Hattiesburg, he had acquired a reputation as a significant leader in the MFDP, the Delta Ministry, and the CGDM. For his work, he suffered several beatings at the hands of law enforcement. Killingsworth served on the Hattiesburg boycott committee with another aggressive activist, a white priest from Ireland, Father Peter Quinn. Raised in the Free State of Ireland, Quinn empathized with the black plight, for he perceived the black struggle as parallel to the suffering of the Irish still under British rule in Northern Ireland. He first arrived in Hattiesburg in 1963 as the priest of the all-white Catholic Church, Sacred Heart. He dabbled in the Movement for several years and tried to enlighten his parish about black suffering. Quinn began to immerse himself fully in the Movement in the fall of 1966 when the Church assigned him to Holy Rosary, the Catholic Church in Hattiesburg which began as an integrated church, but which by 1967 had become all-black. Quinn mobilized many black Catholic teenagers into activists through the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and soon he became the youth leader for the local and later the state NAACP. Many non-Catholic black teenagers joined the CYO because of its involvement with the Movement.⁶⁵

Reverend Killingsworth and Father Quinn recruited hundreds of black high school

⁶⁵ A. L. Hopkins, MSSC Report, June 22, 1965, Sovereignty Commission Records # 2-112-2-17-1-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Digital Archive, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as SCR#, MDAH]; Leland E. Cole, Jr., July 27, 1967, MSSC Report, SCR # 2-64-1-113-1-1-1; MFDP Phone list, April 20, 1965, MSSC Report, SCR # 2-165-6-44-5-1-1, all at MDAH. Peter Oliver Quinn, interview by William Henderson, November 2, 1999, MOHP Digital. Glenda Funchess, interview. Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 24, 2009; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 8, 2009; Henry Naylor, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, all MOHP recordings.

and junior high students to participate in the summer boycott protests. The children became the backbone of the summer Movement. On break from school, they had the time to participate in marches, and unlike most of their parents, they were generally invulnerable to white economic intimidation. Some of these teenagers, including Jimella Stokes, Glenda Funchess, Deborah Delgado and Carolyn and Lillie Jackson, had long participated in the Movement; others, like Eddie Holloway and Henry Naylor, were new recruits to the struggle. So many teenagers participated in the Movement that Father Quinn often had teenagers crammed inside and sitting atop his green station wagon as he transported them to protests. These young black students reinvigorated the Movement with their passion and energy. In addition to the nightly mass meetings, teenagers flocked to CYO and NAACP youth meetings. Under Quinn's leadership, some youths aided the Spirit by delivering threatening notes to blacks who violated the boycott.⁶⁶

Quinn and Killingsworth, the NAACP, and Spirit leaders also expended their energies on protecting the youths and the adults who participated in the marches. They formed a bonding committee that checked jails for arrested activists and bailed them out—often with money secretly given to them by whites. They also taught activists how to avoid police beatings during an arrest. Activists learned to demand that the police handcuff them to prevent officers from claiming that the arrestee had tried to resist arrest or had tried to attack the officer, thus justifying the use of force. Although some of these teenagers launched violent attacks against whites and vandalized property, generally they

⁶⁶ Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Glenda Funchess, interview; James Nix, interview; Peter Quinn, interview. Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview by Patricia Boyett, January 9, 2009; Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009; and Lille Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, September 26, 2009, interview, by Patricia Boyett, all MOHP recordings.

showed remarkable discipline in the struggle, and they submitted to the boundaries established by men like Quinn and Killingsworth. Quinn, a husky six-foot-five man with an aggressive personality, commanded respect with his striking presence. Killingsworth, also an imposing figure with a powerful voice, could silence “five hundred kids” by simply “rais[ing] his hand.”⁶⁷

However, by capitalizing on the sporadic eruptions of black-on-white and black-on-black violence, the white establishment tried to obscure the fact that the black revolt was generally nonviolent and the grievances were legitimate. Local law enforcement representatives portrayed the boycott as a coercive method to achieve compliance with unwarranted demands. They promised to protect the rights of individuals to engage freely in business interactions and pledged to punish people who violated such rights. In an effort to portray the boycott as a violent black revolt, the morning after the march to city hall, the *Hattiesburg American* declared, “Bottle-throwing Negroes late Tuesday night shattered the window of a chartered a Greyhound bus.” The paper neglected to focus on the boycott until the latter half of the article. The editors also claimed that the boycott divided the races and unfairly harmed merchants “who have done their best to adjust to the changing times during a period when this was not an easy thing to do.” They speculated that the boycott’s success stemmed from coercion that inspired some “trouble-makers” to seek “revolution” and pointed to black armed guards as signs of an imminent race war. White authorities also tried to suppress the protest by arresting leaders as well as the rank-and-file. Soon after the boycott and protests began, Sovereignty Commission investigator Leland E. Cole, Jr. aided in the arrest of 22 blacks for intimidating African

⁶⁷ Quoting James Nix, interview. Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview.

Americans desiring to shop at the boycotted stores. Later that day, police arrested 30 blacks for disturbing the peace.⁶⁸

Smith fought back by arguing that white-on-black violence proved much more dangerous. He also defended the right of African Americans to protect themselves against the Klansmen who constantly drove past their meetings in a threatening manner. In the interest of self-defense, the NAACP allowed “shotgun armed guards” to protect the boycott rally. The NAACP also responded to white intransigence by expanding the boycott to places like Steelman’s Grocery, because the owner refused to hire black cashiers, and Lotts Grocery Store, because Mrs. Lotts threatened black people with a gun when they entered her store. Reverend Killingsworth led the nonviolent demonstration outside Lotts with some 25 black youths aged 17 to 19. The lack of violence failed to prevent arrests. Lotts provided the police with an affidavit complaining about the protest, and police arrested the demonstrators on charges of disturbing the peace. Undaunted, 550 people attended a mass meeting held at Ebenezer Baptist Church that same night to celebrate the protest and plan future demonstrations. Although whites tried to counter the effects of the boycott by shopping for all their needs at Hattiesburg stores, their efforts failed to replace the loss of black business. The boycott soon forced many merchants out of business. Smith warned whites that the boycott would continue until the city considered all of the grievances, particularly the demand to fire Owen, McGilvery, and

⁶⁸ First quote, “Negroes Begin Local Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1967; second, third, and fourth quotes, “The Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1967. “City and County Make Public Answers to Negro Objections,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1967; “Dr. Smith Says Klan Scare is Reason for Armed Guards,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 25, 1967; “Assistant of Evers Arrested Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 21, 1967; Leland E. Cole, Jr., Boycott Hattiesburg, MSSC Report, July 27, 1967, SCR# [?], Leesha Faulkner Collection, McCain, USM; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2008.

Miller for police brutality.⁶⁹

Black rage over police brutality exploded on July 27 when Officer Willie McGilvery shot black resident Lonnie Charles MaGee in the chest. Officer McGilvery claimed that while he and his partner, Lawrence Floyd, Jr. investigated an attack on a black café, MaGee, along with several other blacks, approached the patrol vehicle occupied by McGilvery and Floyd and declared, “Everyone of you ought to be killed.” McGilvery tried to arrest MaGee for ridiculing an officer, but MaGee resisted, punched McGilvery in the eye, and then tried to retrieve something from his pocket. Thinking MaGee was reaching for a weapon, McGilvery shot him in the chest. When other police units arrived on the scene to provide backup, Sergeant Jeff Griffis found a pocket knife with a 2½ inch blade in MaGee’s possession. The police learned that MaGee usually spent July in Whitfield State Hospital to receive psychiatric treatment. Mayor Grady, Chief Herring, and Jimmy Finch backed McGilvery and declared the shooting justified. In contrast, most blacks, who distrusted McGilvery, believed the shooting occurred under nefarious and unlawful circumstances. In a formal statement, Smith accused the city of engaging in a “cover up” and expressed concern that racial hostility might erupt into violence: rumors spread that many blacks planned to kill McGilvery.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Quoting “Dr. Smith Says Klan Scare is Reason for Armed Guards,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 25, 1967. “Boycott in 4th Day,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 22, 1967; Correspondence Steve Henderson to A. D. Morgan, July 31 - September 18, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; “Most Store Owners Say Boycott Clamp Still Tight,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 24, 1967; “Negro Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1967; Elliot Chaze, “Puzzle Store Owners,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 1967; “Dr. Smith Says City Must Dismiss Three Policemen,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 21, 1967.

⁷⁰ First quote, “Mayor and Chief Issue Statement,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 27, 1967; second quote, “Police Say Negroes Open Fire on Two Automobiles,”

As Smith predicted, several blacks reacted violently to the incident and the city's protection of McGilvery. On the night of the police shooting, blacks held a rally at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, protected by armed blacks. The guards fired their guns at whites driving by the church and hit one vehicle with four bullets. Soon afterward, when Detective Bobby Earl Roberson and Sovereignty Commission Investigator Cole passed by the church, a black man shot toward their vehicle, but he missed. A police investigation of the incident proved fruitless. Cole and Roberson could not identify the perpetrator as he melted into a crowd of some 350 blacks inside and around the church, and no one would turn him over to the investigators. The following day about 175 African Americans—mostly teenagers—marched two abreast from the NAACP headquarters to the Forrest County Courthouse to protest the MaGee shooting. Addressing the angry crowd, Reverend Killingsworth blamed violence on whites as he declared: “we’re not the ones wearing white sheets.” That night police arrested five blacks for hurling glass bottles into a vehicle driven by a white man, whose passenger sustained minor injuries.⁷¹

In some ways, unlawful and violent actions stained and demoralized the Hattiesburg Movement because they divested the black revolt of its high moral ground. It also allowed the white establishment to exploit such incidents to portray falsely the entire Movement as radical, violent, and unlawful and to obfuscate black oppression. The white

Hattiesburg American, July 28, 1967; Mayor Grady and Chief Herring, statement on shooting of Charles Magee, n. d., HMR.

⁷¹ Quoting Elliott Chaze, “175 Negroes March in Protest,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 29, 1967; “Police Say Negroes Open Fire on Two Automobiles,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 28, 1967; “Negro Youths Arrested,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 31, 1967.

spin-masters used the false portrayal of the struggle as a widespread violent revolt to justify a series of arrests. In late July police arrested 21 blacks—mostly teenagers—and one white man who were picketing on charges ranging from “obstructing sidewalk traffic to interfering with police officers.” Police charged one person with “interference with business.” Smith filed a petition in Federal District Court requesting an injunction to prohibit police from arresting persons engaging in a “peaceful boycott.” Meanwhile, a bi-racial Forrest County grand jury that convened to study the eruption of racial violence condemned the demonstrations as an “interference in peaceful” race relations. They also condemned the use of threats to prevent people from freely conducting business.⁷²

Still, the use of violence also advanced several goals of the Hattiesburg Movement. It forced unanimous black compliance with the boycott, and it communicated to white southerners that the era of black emasculation had ended. White southerners understood the power of violence to control human behavior because they had long used it to suppress African Americans, and they continued to employ threats and intimidation to attack the Movement. At the same time, the black-led violence remained sufficiently minimal so that Smith and the NAACP could fight back against white propaganda. Smith issued a statement in the *Hattiesburg American* imploring activists to continue the protest in a nonviolent manner. He also argued that the NAACP had never condoned violence and had extended great efforts to prevent its use. Although groups of whites had often tried to provoke the black community to retaliate by brutally attacking blacks, African Americans had showed remarkable restraint. He pointed out that the NAACP had no

⁷² First, second, and third quotes, “Most Store Owners Say Boycott Clamp Still Tight,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 24, 1967; fourth quote, “Forrest County Grand Jury Slaps at Boycott and Violence,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 25, 1967.

control over those few “hoodlums” who capitalized on the protest and tried to corrode the struggle with aggression. He also emphasized that the hostility present in Hattiesburg would likely have exploded into race riots had the NAACP not focused that anger into a productive form of protest via the economic boycott.⁷³

Whites ignored Smith’s message. They blamed blacks rather than white racism for racial strife, particularly after the NAACP refused to end the boycott even after the bus company hired a black driver. When the manager of the Hattiesburg bus lines, Roy Coats, announced that the parent company, American Transit Co. of Saint Louis, might permanently shut down the Hattiesburg busses, whites responded with rage. One white resident, in a letter to the *Hattiesburg American*, implored whites to ride the busses to save the jobs of bus drivers. Editors of the *Hattiesburg American* also condemned the boycott: they noted that the boycott had put 20 heads of family out of work. The editors asserted that ultimately the loss of the busses would hurt blacks as they dominated the customer base.⁷⁴

NAACP member Reverend Ervin E. Grimmitt declared that whites rather than blacks were responsible for the discord and loss of jobs. He argued that the city leaders had failed to respond to the genuine grievances of blacks because they believed the black community, out of fear or “apathy,” would not insist on full black inclusion into society and would not pressure the city to meet the demands. He criticized the newspaper’s

⁷³ Quoting “NAACP Says it Does Not Advocate or Condone Violence,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 31, 1967. Douglass T. Baker, interview; Steve Henderson to A. D. Morgan, July 31 1967, Ser. II, Subser.10, PBJ Papers.

⁷⁴ “Hattiesburg City Lines May Shut Down,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 1, 1967; “Suggest Way Some Busses Might be Returned to Service,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 1, 1967; “Negroes Hurting Themselves Most,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 2, 1967.

editorial, calling it a “fear tactic” that no longer worked as blacks understood that they had suffered all of their lives under oppression. The boycott showed that they refused to tolerate their subjugation. Grimmatt also acknowledged that the company had hired one black driver but pointed out that because blacks were the primary customer base of the Hattiesburg bus lines, the token hiring failed to rectify the problem. Moreover, the city still refused to respond to the many other grievances. Grimmatt also lambasted the city for blaming the sporadic violence of a few on Smith and the NAACP. He argued that Smith’s sagacity and strong leadership had the opposite effect—it had prevented massive violence from erupting throughout the city. Consequently, people of all races should offer their gratitude to Smith rather than their disdain.⁷⁵

The city fathers ignored the logic and refused to negotiate. When police continued to arrest blacks on various charges of unlawful picketing based on signed affidavits by whites, the NAACP filed a lawsuit against the city on the grounds that the arrests deterred blacks from engaging in their legal right to protest. To the NAACP’s disappointment, U.S. District Judge Harold Cox not only supported the city fathers by upholding anti-picketing laws, but he tightened the restrictions on demonstrations by preventing protesters from “utter[ing] any sounds or mak[ing] any signs or gestures” while picketing. He further ordered that demonstrators could not number more than six, they must remain five feet apart, and they could not picket on private property. Smith appealed. In his motion for an injunction pending the appeal, Smith alleged that police officers had made several false arrests including the arrest of a black family of five who were walking to a movie and were not even participating in a picket line. Smith also

⁷⁵ Ervin E. Grimmatt, “Negro Minister Gives His views,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 4, 1967.

asserted that police had failed to arrest white hecklers who verbally abused black protesters and who drove their automobiles through picket lines at perilous speeds. He accused the city of using arbitrary arrests and excessive bail to repress the boycott. In response to Smith's lawsuits, on August 30 whites hurled a brick through the window of Smith's office and broke four windows in a Texaco Station where NAACP members often congregated.⁷⁶

Mayor Grady and Chief Herring infuriated the NAACP when they ignored the white attacks, but, instead, issued public statements condemning the actions of the Spirit. They implored blacks who opposed the boycott to shop where they pleased and to "stand up to hoodlums" who attacked their homes, properties, and persons by filing a police report. Smith angrily responded that a few random acts of black violence should not define the primarily peaceful boycott. He also caustically asked: "Are we who have defied the Ku Klux Klan supposed to fear and quake in the face of these few scattered acts of minor violence? No. What is happening in downtown Hattiesburg is an expression of the Negro citizens' determination to overcome economic deprivation, discriminatory law enforcement and disrespectful treatment of Negroes; . . . No amount of intimidation could keep us from shopping downtown if we wanted to." Smith promised that blacks would end the boycott when whites responded to black grievances in a satisfactory manner. Smith tried to keep intact the face of black unity, but behind the scenes he and his wife Jeanette along with several other NAACP members, opposed the Spirit because

⁷⁶ Quoting *C. E. Smith v. Paul E. Grady* (1967), case no., 2206, 7, HMR; *Ibid.*, 1-8; "Most Store Owners," *Hattiesburg American*, July 24, 1967; "Negro Citizens Told," *Hattiesburg American*, August 24, 1967; Steve Henderson to A. D. Morgan, August 31, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers.

they feared it was damaging the NAACP efforts.⁷⁷

Finally, in September, Smith agreed to terminate the boycott after he and other black leaders brokered a hard-fought compromise with white city fathers and business owners. The bus company and some white merchants showed “good faith” in the hiring of blacks in “responsible positions,” and other merchants collectively promised to hire 34 blacks over the next week. When blacks terminated the boycott on September 14, banks hired African American tellers, grocery stores employed black clerks as promised, and the bus company hired more blacks. Long-time local black activist Doug Smith became one of the three black bus drivers, though, immediately afterward, he was drafted and sent to fight in the Vietnam War.⁷⁸

Ultimately, the boycott only partially succeeded, as the leaders of Forrest County ignored many of the demands. They refused to develop a biracial government, enforce school integration, or integrate blacks into the county and city’s governing and police bodies. Additionally, they ignored demands to dismiss three policemen accused of brutality, and they neglected to improve infrastructure in black communities or remove toxic waste from black neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the boycott forced white leaders to open economic opportunities to blacks, and many white businesses desegregated. With these victories, Forrest County’s black citizens gained a new sense of their power to

⁷⁷ First quote, Steve Henderson to A. D. Morgan, July 31 - September 18, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; second quote “NAACP President Answers Mayor and Police Chief,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 25, 1967. Jeanette Smith, interview; Correspondence: Steve Henderson to A. D. Morgan, July 31 - September 18, 1967, Ser. II, Subser. 10, PBJ Papers; “Boycott, Officials Warn,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967; Earline Boyd, interview by Charles Bolton, September 29, 1992, MOHP Digital.

⁷⁸ Quoting “Negro Business,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1967. Sandra Adickes, *The Legacy of a Freedom School* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 153.

effect meaningful change in a small Deep South town. Although blacks in Jones County had also tried to fight racial absolutism that summer, the Laurel Movement had declined just as Klan violence spiraled out of control in the Masonite strike.⁷⁹ Through these struggles, blacks discovered that boycotts, protests, and even violence could generate some changes, but they understood that they could only secure their liberty when the federal and local authorities dismantled the Klan and when blacks obtained political power. So they turned their attention to the 1967 local and state elections.

The 1967 election year concerned everyone in Mississippi. The threat of change terrified most whites, whereas the possibility of stagnation worried most blacks. Political candidates spanned the gamut from Klansmen to the MFDP leaders and from racial conservatives to progressives. All of the five leading gubernatorial candidates, William Waller, John Bell Williams, Ross Barnett, William Winter, and Jimmy Swan publicly supported segregation, but only the Klan candidate, Swan, made it the cornerstone of his campaign. Swan promised to fight the federal government's efforts to "sacrifice our children on the filthy atheistic altar of integration," and he pledged that if he became governor that Mississippi's white children would all be "in private segregated schools that would not cost the parents one dime." Swan acquired substantial support in Forrest County where some 1,000 people swarmed to Kamper Park in early August to hear him speak. Swan ranted that the "riots" exploding across the nation served as the "tools" of a "communist inspired revolution." He pledged that as governor, "should this ugly communist monster raise his head in Mississippi, I will respond with such force and determination that a riot will never have time to materialize." Williams was also a rabid

⁷⁹ Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett) and Danielle McGuire, June 5, 2006, MOHP recording; Jeanette Smith, interview.

racist, but he tempered his speech in comparison to Swan. Winter was the most progressive of the group, and he quietly sought black support. Waller, who had unsuccessfully prosecuted Byron de la Beckwith for the murder of Medgar Evers, portrayed himself as the law and order candidate, and he promised to punish all acts of violence whether committed by the Black Panthers or the Ku Klux Klan.⁸⁰

In his bid for lieutenant governor, Governor Paul Johnson, Jr. also ran on a law and order platform in a field of six Democratic candidates. At the Neshoba County Fair, he characterized “Black Power” as a “storm that contains the thunder of terror and the lightning of violence.” He spoke of its horrible trajectory across the nation and compared it to Nazism. Johnson also promised to suppress violent activities by white extremists, as he warned that violence discouraged industries from locating in Mississippi and harmed the state economically. Johnson was still not a progressive on racial relations, but he was certainly to the left of his opponent, Klan candidate Byron de la Beckwith, who remained an unreconstructed racist after his several mistrials in the Evers’ murder case. At the Neshoba County Fair, Beckwith proclaimed that his governorship would establish “absolute white supremacy under white Christian rule [for] the Negro is not equal.

⁸⁰ Quoting, Dick Tarbutton, “Swan Outlines Program Before Hometown Crowd,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 7, 1967. “Swan Leads in Forrest,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967. James Saggus, “Gubernatorial Candidates Mix Promises and Pokes,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 3, 1967; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009, Helfrich Papers; “Pace Gets Hotter As Ballot Nears,” *Laurel Leader Call*, August 7, 1967; William Waller, “Waller Attacks Klan as ‘Hooded Cowards,’” press release of speech, Laurel Rotary Club, April 25, 1967, Record Group 27, Governors’ Papers, MDAH; The Waller Story, campaign material 1967, Mississippi Republican Party Records, Campaign Literature, William Waller Collection, Mitchell, MSU.

Civilization and savagery is not equal.”⁸¹

Bowers and his Jones County Klansmen believed that their violent county would vote for Klan candidates on the state and local levels. The White Knights ran their Klan lawyer, Charles Blackwell, for district attorney in Jones County, and Klan lawyer Lawrence Arrington for district attorney in Forrest County. Klansmen also set their sights on law enforcement, and for sheriff, they ran Deavours Nix, the Klansman who had launched the Masonite terror campaign and who helped orchestrate Dahmer's murder. Nix portrayed himself as a Baptist, a Mason, a member of the George Wallace Club for President, a successful business owner, and a life-long resident of Jones County except for the five-and-one-half years he served in the U. S. Navy during World War II. He contended that in the past he had devoted himself to “patriotic endeavors as my conscience has dictated,” primarily the preservation of traditional values. He expressed pride in Jones Countians who steadfastly resisted federal encroachment, and he pledged that if elected, “I will do my duty as I see it toward the end that majesty of the law [be] upheld, that the cause of freedom and local self-government be strengthened, and that the rights to safety of person and preservation of private property shall not be violated.” In secret White Knight meetings, Nix promised Klansmen that if he won the sheriff's office, the Klan would run Laurel. Bowers ordered Klansmen to show up at every polling place

⁸¹ First, second, third quotes, Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr., Address at Neshoba County Fair, Philadelphia, Mississippi, August 4, 1966, Ser. II, Subser. 4, PBJ Papers; fourth quote James Saggus, “Gubernatorial Candidates Mix Promises and Pokes,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 3, 1967. James Saggus, “John Bell Omits Issues, Cuts Rivals,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 4, 1967.

in Jones County and across the state to intimidate black voters.⁸²

To Bowers' chagrin, the MFDP had great expectations for the 1967 election because it had developed a new strategy of building a local political foundation from the grassroots. MFDP candidates ran for justice of the peace, town supervisor, and sheriff. Sixty black candidates decided to run for local offices as independents, and the MFDP provided them with campaign contributions, advice, and political support. The MFDP platform called for a complete reorganization of Mississippi's educational structure; the destruction of the state's economic system based on black exploitation; desegregation of the AFL-CIO; an investigation of the Klan's dominance of the Masonite strike in Laurel; and the development of greater self-defense for blacks. One of the Central Piney Woods' most important black leaders, Victoria Gray, campaigned for the MFDP and black independent candidates throughout Mississippi and traveled across the nation to solicit financial support. She informed her audiences that although great changes had taken place in Mississippi, it remained a "police state" in which diehard segregationist leaders, including Stennis and Eastland, still held Mississippi's U. S. Senate seats. Nevertheless, as black registration had increased over the past four years from 30,000 to 225,000, the MFDP hoped to begin changing the racial face of Mississippi with the 1967 election. In the Central Piney Woods, the federal cases against registrars Theron Lynd in Forrest County and Leonard Caves in Jones County were finally having the desired results.

⁸² Quoting "Deavours Nix Announces As Candidate for Sheriff," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 20, 1967, Nix FBI File, vol. 3, #157-3484-271, Helfrich Papers. FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1009; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, July 5, 1968, Nix FBI File, vol. 5, #157-2482-455, all in Helfrich Papers. "List Official Vote for Jones County," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 11, 1967; "DA Finch Re-Elected," *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967.

Although whites dominated the populations of Jones and Forrest counties, when blacks registered they were placed in jury pools, and thus, they could have an effect on racial justice.⁸³

To the MFDP's great joy, blacks voted in record numbers and elected many black leaders across the state in counties where blacks constituted a majority. More black and white citizens of Jones County cast their ballots in August 1967 than in any other time in the county's history. Although Mississippians predominantly voted for Williams and Winter, which forced them into a run-off campaign, the white majorities in Jones and Forrest Counties largely voted for the Klan's handpicked candidate, Jimmy Swan. In Jones County, Swan received 5,754 votes and the most racially moderate candidate Winter came in second with 5,686. Forrest County also saw record numbers of voters. Most of the 2,900 black eligible black voters cast ballots. Still the large white vote allowed Swan to carry Forrest with 5,178 votes compared to 4,825 for Winter. At the least, Beckwith lost his bid for lieutenant governor and came in second to last place in the six-man race. Klan candidates also suffered losses at the local level in the Central Piney Woods. In Forrest County, Finch defeated Klan lawyer Lawrence Arrington in a landslide 10,943 to 4,888. Still, the infamous racist registrar, Theron Lynd, easily defeated his

⁸³ Quoting Victoria Gray Adams, "Black Politics in Mississippi," speech, National Conference for New Politics, September 2, 1967, Adams Papers. "Pace Gets Hotter As Ballot Nears," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 7, 1967; *United States v. Leonard Caves* (1965) case no. 1963 (H (M), *United States District Court Southern District of Mississippi Docket*, U. S. District Court, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; *United States v. Theron Lynd, Circuit Clerk and Registrar of Voters of Forrest County and the State of Mississippi* (June 1965), case no. 22477, Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, *The United States of America v. Theron C. Lynd Collection*, McCain, USM. National Conference for New Politics Constitution, pamphlet; "Mississippi Delegation Position Paper," National Conference for New Politics Convention, August 29 - September 4, Chicago, Illinois, both in Adams Papers.

opponent, Carleton Brazionis, 13,176 to 2,565. In Jones County, Klansman Nix lost his bid for sheriff, and Klan candidate Charles Blackwell was defeated in his bid for district attorney after a run-off election.⁸⁴ Although the segregationists won many powerful positions, the Klan lost.

During the gubernatorial run-offs, Central Piney Woods whites struggled to ensure that the much more conservative Williams beat Winter. Soon after the primaries, on a humid August night, 2,500 people crowded into a Hattiesburg ball park to hear Williams speak. Standing on a platform above home plate, Williams lambasted his opponent for using the “minority bloc” to acquire the votes needed to make it into the run-off election, “but now he’s wrapped his liberalism in a Confederate flag and put on a George Wallace hat. . . . He’s trying to act like a good, solid, conservative. He doesn’t know the meaning of the word.” According to the *Laurel Leader-Call*, Williams “preache[d] a brand of political evangelicalism that white Mississippians like to hear [-] law and order, states’ rights, segregation, and constitutional government.” The paper characterized Winter as a moderate. After losing the primary, Swan helped sway the vote toward Williams as he campaigned for him vigorously. Williams won the run-off election, and he carried Forrest 9,241 to 6,573 and Jones 8,118 to 6,123. During his fall campaign against Republican Rubel Phillips, Williams promised to sustain states’ rights,

⁸⁴ “Williams and Winter Run-Off,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 9, 1967; “List Official Vote For Jones County,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 11, 1967; “Final Forrest Figures Show 16,271 Voted in First Primary,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 10, 1967; “Swan Leads in Forrest,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967; “Not KKK Member’ Says Blackwell,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 12, 1967; “Odom, Landrum, Knight Victors,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 30, 1967; “DA Finch Re-Elected,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967; “Swan Leads in Forrest,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1967; FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, July 5, 1968, Nix FBI File, vol. 5, #157-2482-455, Helfrich Papers.

but he emphasized that Mississippi could no longer fight the federal government in a “head-on confrontation which does irreparable harm to the state. We’re going to have to resort to more subtle and diplomatic methods of resistance without surrendering our principles.”⁸⁵

The federal intervention in Mississippi had taught the White Knights also the dangers of direct confrontation. Yet rather than retreating from violent assaults and settling for a newer more covert form of racial absolutism, Bowers held fast to his new concepts of guerrilla warfare insurgency. He was certain that his secret terror cells would prevent infiltration and arrests; he was also sure that his new strategy would wear down the federal government until it abandoned blacks as it had during Reconstruction. Thus, he proceeded that fall with his massive bombing campaign. However, Bowers forgot one of the most important rules of insurgency—sustain the loyalty of the underlings. The Klan’s mistreatment of Truman Weber Rogers had led him to betray the White Knights and become the first key witness in the Dahmer case. Bowers’ persistent mistreatment of underlings drove another Klansman to betray the organization. During the late summer of 1967, Klan informants revealed to the FBI that a breach had developed between Billy Roy Pitts and Bowers. According to the informants, Pitts harbored a grudge toward Bowers because he had bonded out Buckley and paid his attorney fees in the Watkins

⁸⁵ First and second quotes, Elliott Chaze, “John Bell Lays in on Winter in Address Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 18, 1967; third and fourth quotes, “Vows Order to Prevail,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 30, 1967. William S. White, “Williams Aided By Washington Action,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 7, 1967. “Governor’s Table,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 1967; “Swan Influence Over Elections,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 14, 1967; “Odom, Landrum, Knight Victors,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 30, 1967; Maryanne Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi: The Murder of Medgar Evers, the Trials of Byron De La Beckwith, and the Haunting of the New South* (Boston: Bay Back Books, 1995), 227.

affair while leaving Pitts to fend for himself. Another informant revealed that Buckley planned to “throw a curve [in the Watkins case] so that Billy Roy Pitts will be involved more deeply and possibly get killed before the upcoming trial in early October.”

Although Pitts was not an FBI informant at this point, many White Knights believed incorrectly that he was talking to the FBI and discussed eliminating him. The Klan seemed willing to discard Pitts even though that he had remained extremely faithful to his brothers and his oath.⁸⁶

Bitter and frustrated by the betrayal, Pitts had no idea whom to trust after he heard rumors of Bowers’ plans. A fellow Klansman, Jesse White, lured Pitts into his confidence. Unbeknownst to Pitts, White had become an informant for the FBI, mostly because he thought he could extort cash from agents. When White realized that Pitts had participated in the Dahmer attack and had the information the FBI needed, White seized on an opportunity to turn a profit. He promised to deliver Pitts to agents in exchange for \$5,000 up front and \$10,000 after Pitts testified. He also claimed that Pitts expected a new vehicle and \$2,000 for testimony in each trial. The FBI refused but pressured White to deliver Pitts to them anyhow. Pitts was near a nervous breakdown when White suggested that he become a Klan informant. He had spent many nights haunted by nightmares of the Dahmer murder, and he spent many days terrified that his Klan brothers were planning to execute him. Pitts fled to Louisiana to seek guidance from his

⁸⁶ FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 39, # 44-1512-3291; FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011; FBI Report, June 7, 1967, attached SAC, Jackson to Director, August 3, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-786, all in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*; “Pitts Testifies,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 14, 1968; “Killed by the Klan,” prod. and dir. by Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel by Stuart Television Productions, Inc. 1999; Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 252-254.

brother, a pastor, who persuaded Pitts to turn himself into the FBI. White arranged the deal—Pitts would talk in exchange for protection.⁸⁷

As the summer of 1967 wound toward its violent end, it became clear that betrayal would prove the undoing of the Klan. The insurrections fractured white solidarity while they strengthened black cohesiveness and resolve. Although Bowers' guerrilla warfare strategy was brilliant, he faltered in its execution. He failed to politicize the Klan, and his ego prevented him from allowing his underground terror cells to execute Klan hits untraceable to him. Moreover, when Bowers ordered attacks on whites, like Jack Watkins and Masonite workers, and when he allowed Nix to launch a lawsuit against a sheriff popular among white residents, he destroyed his support base. Many Klan sympathizers, despite their racist ideologies, turned against the Invisible Empire. Simultaneously, the persistence of white terror, in frank defiance of the federal presence, inspired blacks to launch massive protests against the racial order, and incited some of them occasionally to initiate violent attacks against whites. Although white patriarchs capitalized on black violence to demoralize the black freedom struggle, it actually strengthened the Hattiesburg Movement as it taught whites that blacks would violently combat terrorism, and it forced African Americans to unanimously support the boycott. Each of the summer insurrections diminished white power. The boycott forced white patriarchs to broker compromises with black activists in Hattiesburg, and the terror campaign in Masonite induced white citizens to indict a number of Klansmen in Laurel. Bowers refused to accept it yet, but by the time the summer of 1967 concluded, he had

⁸⁷ "Killed by the Klan"; FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 39, #44-1512-3291, Helfrich Papers; "Notes Taken From the Files of the FBI," Delmar Dennis and Jesse White Notebook, both in Helfrich Papers.

lost his power over the Central Piney Woods and over his own Invisible Empire. His betrayal of his minions soon proved his final undoing. The summer of rage cultivated the landscape for the decisive battle of the racial war that still ravaged Mississippi.

CHAPTER IX

MUTINY: THE TRIALS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

The mutiny against Jim Crow justice in Mississippi began at 7:40 p.m. on September 29, 1967 when Klansman Billy Roy Pitts entered room 334 at the Jackson Admiral Bendow Inn and informed FBI Agents Robert Lee and William Dukes that he and several other Klansmen had murdered Vernon Dahmer. In the quiet motel room, the tall, ruddy-faced Klansman forsook his Klan brothers and joined forces with the FBI, his enemy. Pitts began, "I . . . was nineteen years old when I first went into the Klan." Late into the night, Pitts led agents on a bloody trail of Klan attacks and into the heart of the Invisible Empire as he unveiled its secrets, its members, and its power over Mississippi. When Pitts spoke of the murder of Vernon Dahmer, he revealed facts that agents had spent nearly 21 months trying to confirm—the identities and roles of all the men who had attacked Dahmer's house and store.¹

The turning of Billy Roy Pitts in the DABURN case proved even more significant than the turning of Klansmen James Jordan and Doyle Barnette in the Neshoba murders of three civil rights workers in the MIBURN case. Although the MIBURN trial would soon produce significant federal convictions, to fully dismantle the Invisible Empire the FBI needed local prosecutors to turn against the Klan and local juries to send Klansmen to prison on state charges. Prior to Pitts' confession, District Attorney Jimmy Finch

¹ Quoting Billy Roy Pitts, written confession, FBI File, #[?] Billy Roy Pitts Notebook, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Pitts, written confession, Helfrich Papers]. Billy Roy Pitts, typed confession, September 30, 1967, FBI File, #33-31694-555, in Billy Roy Pitts Notebook, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as Pitts, typed confession, Helfrich Papers]. "Killed by the Klan," prod. and dir. Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel by Stuart Television Productions, Inc. 1999.

informed the FBI that he needed more evidence before he could even consider filing murder charges against the DABURN suspects. Without the testimony of a participant, the Department of Justice also refrained from proceeding with a federal trial as an acquittal might spur Klan growth. With Pitts' confession, Finch and Jimmy Dukes, who had once used all their power to suppress the Movement, wielded all their considerable skills to help the FBI to develop a state case against the Klansmen.² The recipe for the Klan's destruction needed only one more ingredient—the turning of the people, for prosecutors needed local juries willing to return guilty verdicts. Certainly, the racist attitudes of most local whites had intensified during the Movement, but the disdain for the Klan had also grown. Few applauded the murder of Dahmer. Many whites considered it an evil act. Most of them grew irate that outsiders from Jones County had invaded their county, murdered one of their citizens, and brought the federal war against white supremacy to their beloved Hattiesburg. Some of them, even stalwart segregationists, joined the mutiny against their racial order when they accepted, albeit reluctantly, a move toward a more equitable judicial system rather than allowing their county to drown in Klan violence and federal interventionism.

The MIBURN case in conjunction with several other Klan cases emerging in the final years of the 1960s weakened the White Knights, but the DABURN cases delivered the mortal blow to the Invisible Empire. As a member of the Laurel Klavern, Pitts had extensive knowledge of the inner workings of the White Knights and knew the secrets and crimes of the top echelon. Pitts' klavern, after all, was located in Bowers' hometown of Laurel, which was the headquarters for the Invisible Empire. Pitts not only provided

² Notes Taken From the File of the FBI, Notebook Delmar Dennis & Jesse White, Helfrich Papers.

agents and local prosecutors with a wealth of evidence to convict Dahmer's killers but copious information about numerous other cases, including the Watkins kidnapping and the Klan terror campaign at Masonite.³ In late 1967, Mississippi Klansmen suffered for one of their worst mistakes—the mistreatment of Billy Roy Pitts—for he betrayed them all, and his confession tore down the walls of the Invisible Empire.

Pitts' story about Dahmer's murder was not the only theory circulating. Delmar Dennis, the Klan informant from Lauderdale, Mississippi, remained devoted to the six-man theory. Pitts provided a list of Klansmen who had attacked Dahmer's home and store that differed slightly from Dennis' conjecture. The FBI concluded that since Pitts participated in the attack, "it would appear likely that his information would be more accurate than the information furnished to the confidential source [Delmar Dennis] allegedly by Sam Bowers, as it is conceivable that Bowers put out an erroneous story in an effort to confuse the information which was being gathered at the time." Pitts' confession also corroborated statements from other participants and conspirators. Byrd and Sessum had admitted to agents that Pitts and Noble participated in the attacks, which corresponded to Pitts' story. Pete Martin, while briefly cooperating with the FBI, contended that the Dahmer project would have required eight men: a wheel man, a bottle man, and two gunmen for each vehicle. Pitts' confession corresponded with the physical evidence at the crime scene, including the position of shotgun shells and the pistol found at the scene, which Pitts revealed belonged to him. Finally, Pitts also attended meetings at

³ For the Neshoba Case, see Don Whitehead, *The Attack on Terror: The FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 179-201. For the turning of Pitts, see Billy Roy Pitts FBI File, vols. 2 & 3; Pitts, typed confession; Pitts, written confession; and FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 39, #44-1512-3291, all in Helfrich Papers.

which the Dahmer project was discussed, and his accounts of the discussions and participants matched that of state witness Truman Weber Rogers. Federal and local prosecutors began to build their cases around Pitts' confession.⁴

Pitts also became a significant informant in several other Klan cases, and his admissions helped prosecutors across south Mississippi bring charges against several Klansmen. During his meetings with Agents Lee and Dukes, Pitts confirmed Jack Watkins' narrative of his kidnapping and revealed the identity of the three masked men—Cecil Sessum, Deavours Nix, and Sam Bowers. The agents gave District Attorney Donald Cumbest in Pascagoula a copy of Pitts' confession, and he began to rebuild the Watkins case. Pitts also helped the FBI in the Masonite cases, as he informed agents that he had sold explosives to Andre Hendry and Norman Lee whom he believed blew up bridges and gas lines at Masonite. Although by late September the violence surrounding the Masonite struggle had subsided, the strike continued. Agents passed information about the Masonite cases to Jones County Prosecutor Charles Pickering and Laurel

⁴ Quoting, FBI Prosecutive Summary Report, March 12, 1966, FBI File, #44-31694-231 and -589, Sealed Federal Documents, *State v. Charles Noble*, Helfrich Papers. For Sessum's statements, see FBI Report, March 3, 1966, Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-126; FBI Non-Prosecutive Supplemental Summary Report, March 8, 1966, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 1, #157-854-67, all in Helfrich Papers. For Martin's statement, see, SAC, Jackson to Director, March 4, 1966, FBI File, vol. 23, #44-1512-1083; Joyce Martin to SAC, Jackson, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1099, both in Helfrich Papers. For evidence corroborating Pitts' confession, see aforementioned sources, and Robert P. Womack to SAC, Jackson, June 12, 1967, Truman Weber Rogers FBI File, vol. 1, # 157-6389-33; Billy Roy Pitts Testimony, *State of Mississippi v. Cecil Sessum* (1968), case no. 45,174 vol. 3, Billy Roy Pitts, Helfrich Subject Files, both in Helfrich papers; "FBI Identifies Giles Vehicle," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 13, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Car Brought into Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1968; "DeBoxtel was on Dahmer 'Dry Run,'" *Hattiesburg American*, March 20, 1968; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 238-239; Agent James W. Awe Testimony, *State of Mississippi v. Cecil Sessum* (1968). case no. 45,174, Awe, James W., 133-163, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. For building the cases, see SAC, Jackson to Director, November 4, 1967, FBI File, vol. 40, #44-1512-3327, Helfrich Papers.

District Attorney Chet Dillard who had hoped to end their last year as prosecutors in Jones County with convictions in the Masonite cases. They had already suffered one defeat. In early September, jurors quickly found W. G. Mosley not guilty of interfering with the employment of Masonite workers. While Cumbest worked on the Watkins case in Pascagoula and Pickering and Dillard built the Masonite cases in Laurel, the most publicized Klan case in Mississippi to date—MIBURN—came to trial on October 9 in Meridian, a small city 90 miles northeast of Hattiesburg.⁵

More than three years had passed since FBI agents found the bodies of freedom fighters Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman. Local prosecutors never made any effort to bring the Klansmen to trial on charges of kidnapping and murder. But the Department of Justice, with the help of Klan informants, presented a powerful case against Bowers and 17 other Klansmen for violating the civil rights of the three murdered men. On October 20, 1967, a Meridian jury found Bowers and six other defendants guilty, marking the first time a Mississippi jury had convicted Klansmen in a major federal civil rights case. Judge Cox, however, allowed Bowers and the other

⁵ Billy Roy Pitts, statement re: Jack Watkins, FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, vol. 39, #44-1512-3291; FBI Report, November 1, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-177, both in Helfrich Papers. *State of Mississippi v. W. G. Mosley* (1967), case no. 3062, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 24, 31, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi; Charles Pickering, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 21, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 791-794, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews in printed volumes cited by volume, MOHP; interviews in the digital collection cited as MOHP Digital; and recordings in this collection cited as MOHP recording. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. *United States v. Cecil Ray Price, et al.* (1967), case no. 5291, United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi, transcript, Eastern Division, Jackson, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *U. S. v. Price* (1967)].

convicted Klansmen to post bond pending the sentencing hearing in December. A few days later, Judge Cox learned that someone had stolen large quantities of dynamite in Meridian, and two MIBURN defendants purportedly jested about using dynamite in future attacks. Judge Cox warned the Klansmen that he would revoke bail of all of the MIBURN defendants if a single bomb exploded in south Mississippi.⁶

Despite the warnings, by late October Bowers began to wreak havoc across Mississippi. Immediately after posting bail, Bowers and Nix searched for Pitts, as they suspected he had become an FBI informant. They contacted his father who informed them that his son had moved to Houston. Actually, Pitts remained in Mississippi, but Nix and Bowers failed to find him. On November 9, Pitts pled guilty to kidnapping charges in the Watkins' case. On November 10, authorities arrested Bowers, Sessum, and Nix on charges of obstructing justice, conspiracy to kidnap, and kidnapping Jack Watkins. Immediately afterward, Special Agent in Charge Roy Moore relocated Pitts to Cincinnati, Ohio because the Klan had learned that he had become an FBI informant, and his life was in danger. On November 12, Bowers, Sessum, and Nix pled not guilty to the charges in the kidnapping case, but Judge Darwin Maples refused to set bond until further review and remanded the men to jail in Jackson County.⁷

⁶ *U. S. v. Price* (1967); Florence Mars, with Lynn Eden, *Witness in Philadelphia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 250. "Bowers Gets 10 Years in Prison," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 30, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-904; FBI Report: Bombing Investigations in Mississippi, June 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1099, both in Helfrich Papers. Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 65-69.

⁷ SAC, Jackson to Director, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-188; Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, October 26, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-176; "Pitts Pleads Kidnap Guilt," *The Clarion-Ledger*, November 10, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-181, all in Helfrich Papers. "Billy Roy Pitts," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November

The new pastor of Saint Paul's Methodist Church in Laurel, Reverend Allen Johnson, declared that the people of Laurel could finally sleep easy now that the White Knights were behind bars. Before moving to Laurel in June 1967, Johnson, a member of the NAACP and MFDP, had spent several years working with the AFL-CIO and the Mississippi Voters League to register blacks in Jackson. His church in Laurel, however, had not been involved much in the Movement. Enraged by Johnson's comment, Bowers soon taught the minister that no enemy of the White Knights could ever sleep well. While Bowers remained behind bars, on November 15 a bomb planted by the Klan's secret cell exploded in the carport of the Johnson home. The dynamite decimated the family vehicle and collapsed the roof of the house. Johnson, his wife, children, and grandchildren were all asleep when the bomb exploded, but no one was injured. The attack on Johnson kicked off the Klan's fall bombing campaign. On November 19, a bomb blew up the front porch of a home in Jackson; the target was Robert Kochtitsky a white civil rights activist. The following day, Bowers, Nix, and Sessum were each released on \$20,000 bond. The next night, dynamite destroyed the porch and damaged the study of the residence of Rabbi Perry E. Nussbaum, a member of the Committee of Concern in Jackson, who had hosted integrated meetings at his synagogue. Police theorized that the Klan had launched the bombing campaign to retaliate for the recent arrests, indictments, trials, and convictions of various White Knights. The *Laurel Leader-Call* reminded the public that Judge Cox had promised to revoke the bail of all of the MIBURN defendants in the event of a bomb-related terror attack in south Mississippi. Cox proved unworthy of

9, 1967, "Charges Bowers in Kidnapping," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 10, 1967; "Held Without Bail: Bowers, Buckley, Two Others Enter Pleas," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 13, 1967.

his word.⁸

After the attack on Reverend Johnson's home, some whites reached out to blacks. The local Committee of Concern issued a statement condemning the bombing and developed a biracial organization with black leaders to preempt violence, open lines of communication, and discuss future black protests. On November 30, the Jones County Ministerial Association also condemned the attack as an "unmitigated act of cowardice" and "a symptom of the underlying animosities, hatreds, and prejudices that find a place in our midst." The association pledged its support of all law enforcement agencies seeking to solve the crime. One of the signatories, Reverend Robert Marsh of First Baptist Church in Laurel, represented the typical white moderate minister in Jones County. He despised Klan violence and believed in the spiritual equality of humans before God. He had often counseled his 10-year-old son that Nazism and slavery were among the greatest evils in the world, once declaring that "there is no justification for what we did to the Negro. It was an evil thing and we were wrong." Still, he failed to denounce segregation. He considered such matters political rather than spiritual, which gave him a convenient

⁸ FBI Report: Bombing Investigations in Mississippi, June 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1099; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 50, 65-70; Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 134- 135; "Bowers, Buckley, Two Others Enter," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 13, 1967; "Parsonage of Negro Minister Dynamited," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 15, 1967; "Bowers Out," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 21, 1967; Vernon A Gudry Jr., "Rabbi's Home is Latest in Series of Terror Bombings in Jackson," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 22, 1967; "Blast Rips Home of Jackson Rabbi," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 22, 1967; Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, April 4, 1967, Sovereignty Commission Records # 99-59-0-14-1-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Digital Archive, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC Report, SCR#, MDAH].

excuse to avoid the conflict.⁹ At the least, in 1967 a smattering of white moderates like Marsh began to speak out against racial violence.

Blacks across the Central Piney Woods expressed their outrage with mass protests against the bombing. Reverend Milton Barnes and Reverend J. C. Killingsworth from Hattiesburg, along with nearly all the black ministers in Laurel, led 100 black students from Oak Park High School in a protest march from Johnson's burned home to Laurel's city hall. From the steps of city hall, Killingsworth shouted that the Klansmen had attacked Johnson in the same way they had attacked Vernon Dahmer, like "dirty dogs who do their cowardly acts under the edge of darkness." Nothing had changed except black patience. Referring to race riots in Michigan, he added, "We do not want a Detroit in Laurel, but we are at the end of our patience. We want to live in peace if the white people will let us. We have taken every kind of abuse and turned the cheek three times, but we will not take any more." Killingsworth warned authorities, including Chief L. C. Nix and sovereignty commission investigators who kept surveillance on the protest, that if they failed to deliver "justice . . . we will do whatever is necessary, as long as it's within the law" to ensure the Klansmen were punished.¹⁰

Despite such passionate speeches, black activism posed little threat to the white establishment that fall as the Laurel Movement continued to decline, and divisiveness sapped the Hattiesburg Movement of the power it had enjoyed that summer. Several

⁹ First and second quotes, Marsh, *The Last Days*, 137; third quote Ibid., 44. Ibid., 46; "Committee of Concern Adds Voice of Protest," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 16, 1967; "Jones Area Pastors Deplore Violence," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 1, 1967.

¹⁰ Quoting "Protest March Staged in City," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 15, 1967. Investigator Lee Cole to Director Erle Johnston, Jr., November 15, 1967, SCR #2-49-0-64-1-1-1, MDAH.

veteran members of the NAACP, particularly J. C. Killingsworth, J. C. Fairley, Ellis Fluker, and Daisy Harris grew frustrated with the conservative leadership of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP led by Dr. C. E. Smith. Harris had become particularly upset when Smith terminated the 1967 summer boycott without consulting her and several other NAACP members. Fairley and Harris also disapproved of the trajectory of the NAACP, as they perceived it becoming increasingly elitist and more of a “social club” than a civil rights group. The foursome insisted that the NAACP initiate direct-action projects until the city acquiesced to all of the NAACP demands. Smith disagreed and preferred working behind the scene to compromise with city fathers. Determined to force greater concessions from the white patriarchs, the foursome formed the Forrest County Action Committee (FCAC), which they used in the fall of 1967 to launch a selective buying campaign against Broad Way Mart Shopping Center, A & P Stores, Gibson’s Discount Store, Kent’s Dollar Store, and Donovan Lane Men’s Store. As only a few hundred blacks participated, the campaign proved ineffective and ended after six days.¹¹

Nevertheless, C. E. Smith and his wife, Jeanette, perceived the FCAC as a threat to the local NAACP and its goals. They feared that such groups and radical leaders would damage the reputation of the local branch and alienate the white leaders who were

¹¹ Roy Wilkins to J. C. Fairley, January 25, 1968, J. C. Fairley Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as Fairley Papers and the library cited as McCain, USM]. Forrest County NAACP Minutes and Forrest County Action Notebook, Summary of Forrest County Action Committee (FCAC) meeting, September 24, 1967, Summary of (FCAC) meeting, November 30, 1967, all in Daisy Harris Wade Papers, McCain, USM. Lee Cole, MSSC Report, December 7, 1967, Series II, Subser. 9, Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr., Johnson Family Papers, McCain, USM [hereinafter cited as PBJ Papers]; Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett) and Danielle McGuire, June 2006, MOHP recording; J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, 1977, vol. 375, 60, 63, MOHP.

negotiating with them. They also preferred to abide by the rules of the national NAACP, which required permission to launch major protests. The Smiths perceived a slow but steady course as ultimately more effective than boycotts, which they argued exploded onto the scene and then just as quickly diminished into ashes. Consequently, they struggled to divest Killingsworth, Fairley, Fluker, and Harris of their power. In an official report to the national executive committee, Smith accused the foursome, all of whom still remained members of the NAACP, of embracing black militancy, usurping NAACP projects, and seeking to radicalize the Movement. After a hasty January hearing, the NAACP expelled the foursome. The FCAC activists responded by launching a series of protests, but they only garnered mediocre support. The polarization weakened the Hattiesburg Movement, and activism stagnated.¹²

During these years, the Klan also experienced divisiveness, particularly as blitzkrieg attacks from local authorities against the White Knights inspired more mutinies from within the Invisible Empire. Soon after Billy Roy Pitts provided agents information about the Masonite terror campaign, a Klansman telephoned Dillard to report that he had some information about the murder of the Masonite security guard Robert Billiot. The caller asked Dillard to meet him in the parking lot of a funeral home and ordered him to come alone. Pickering was at Dillard's home on the night of the call, and both men worried that the Klansman hoped to draw the district attorney to a dark parking lot to

¹² Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; Roy Wilkins to J. C. Fairley, January 25, 1968, Fairley Papers, USM; Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett) and Danielle McGuire; J. C. Fairley interview, 60. L. E. Cole, MSSC Report, May 1, 1968, SCR #2-30-0-77-1-1-1; Lee Cole, MSSC Report, May 1968, SCR# 2-64-2-14-1-1-1; Lee Cole, MSSC Report, May 23, 1968, SCR #99-2-0-41-1-1-1; Lee Cole to Director, July 16, 1968, SCR #99-48-0-17-1-1-1, all at MDAH.

attack or kill him. When Laurel police officers refused to provide backup, Pickering borrowed an officer's pistol and accompanied Dillard. They arrived early and Pickering rushed inside the funeral home and hid near the window. He watched as the Klansman drove up to the meeting place and climbed into the vehicle with Dillard. To Pickering's relief, the meeting proceeded peacefully, and the Klansman gave Dillard information about the murder.¹³

On October 7, Laurel police arrested V. L. "Dubie" Lee and Andre Hendry of Waynesboro for the murder of Billiot. At the preliminary hearing, Pickering and Dillard played a tape of Hendry discussing the killing with Klan informant Jesse White. Hendry told White that he planned to shoot the guard's "brains out, and Dubie said, 'Shoot at the legs.' I said 'Hell no. I'm gonna shoot his ---- brains out.'" When White asked him if he had any qualms about the murder, Hendry responded, "Naw, it didn't bother me a f----g bit. I pulled them shells out and handed them both to Dubie and took off, and I went around to the front . . . and sat down and drank coffee." Lee and Hendry were among the most violent Klansmen in Laurel. During Freedom Summer, Lee had participated in the attack on the Brewel Curie farm and had brutally beaten David Gelfand. In the fall of 1967, Henry and Lee's savagery caught up with them; the grand jury indicted them for the murder of Billiot.¹⁴

¹³ Charles Pickering, interview by Patricia Buzard, July 21, 2006, 793-794, MOHP. FBI Summary of Investigation, October 24, 1967, DABURN FBI File, #44-1512-3291; FBI Report, November 1, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-177; Notes Taken From the Files of the FBI, Delmar Dennis and Jesse White Notebook, all in Helfrich Papers.

¹⁴ Quoting "Bind Lee, Hendry to Grand Jury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 12, 1967. "Two Are Jailed in Billiot Death," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 7, 1967; "Lawmen Jail Laurel Man," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 21, 1967; *State of Mississippi v. Andre*

Pickering and Dillard hoped that their evidence in the Billiot and other Masonite cases would help them terminate the Klan's reign in Laurel; however, Judge Lunsford Casey and jurors consistently refused to punish the perpetrators. In late November 1967, Henry West pled guilty to shooting into the home of a Masonite employee. Judge Casey, who had earlier implored the grand jury to indict the Klan terrorists in Masonite cases and compared them to Nazis, sentenced West to five years, but then the judge suspended the sentence and placed West on five years probation. West's co-conspirator, Lavelle Stockman, pled not guilty. During Stockman's trial, West, then a prosecution witness, testified that he drove a truck past Hathorne's residence while Stockman shot into the home. When Stockman took the stand, he denied that he had engaged in any violence against Masonite workers. On cross-examination, Pickering asked Stockman if he belonged to the Klan and had attended a meeting with Deavours Nix recently. Defense counsel objected to the question as prejudicial to his client and demanded a mistrial. Judge Casey ordered the jury to disregard the question and answer regarding the Klan, but he refused to grant a mistrial. On December 7, the jury composed of five whites and seven blacks found Stockman not guilty. Pickering left office and the new prosecutors dismissed some of the pending Masonite cases, passed others to the files, and procrastinated on the Billiot case. According to Pickering, the new prosecutors lacked the

Hendry and Vander Lee (1967) case no. 3082, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 486, 530, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Hendry and Lee* (1967)]. For Andre Hendry and Vander Lee as known Klansmen, see FBI Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #157-18-1011, Helfrich Papers; "COFO Reports Racial Incident," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 24, 1964; WATS Report, August 24, 1964, Ser. 7, Reel 15, SNCC Papers; Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007, MOHP recording.

courage to pursue Klan cases.¹⁵

On the national level, the stand against Klan violence at Masonite proved equally ineffective. Although in late November 1969, the National Labor Relations Board had found the International Woodworkers Union of American guilty of inciting some acts of violence during the Masonite strike, no Klansmen ever suffered fines or prison sentences for these actions. On December 8, tumult over Masonite ended when the union and Masonite reached an agreement. A few days later, the Mississippi Supreme Court found the union and five of its leaders guilty of contempt of court injunctions against striking, but none of these charges touched the Klan. By December 12, more than 250 strikers returned to work.¹⁶ The Klan survived the Masonite cases basically intact, but the DABURN investigation remained a powerful threat.

¹⁵ Charles Pickering, interview, 791-792; *Ibid.*, 791-794. *State of Mississippi v. W. G. Mosley* (1967) case no. 3062, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 24, 31; *State of Mississippi v. N. J. Gray, N. T. Lee, V. A. Flynt, D. M. Haigler* (1967), case no. 3058, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court: Jones County*, vol. 5, 473; *State of Mississippi v. N. J. Gray, N. T. Lee, V. A. Flynt, D. M. Haigler* (September 1968), case no. 3058, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 25, 486, all at Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi. "West Sentenced, Given Probation," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 30, 1967; "Judge Deplores Guard's Murder: Grand Jury Is Charged," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 21, 1967; State Witness Tabs Stockman," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1967; "Stockman Wins An Acquittal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 8, 1967. *State of Mississippi v. Lavelle Stockman* (1967-1968) case no. 5619, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 4, 157; *State of Mississippi v. Arnold C. Brady* (1967-1968), case no. 5598, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 471-472, both at Jones County Court, Laurel, Mississippi.

¹⁶ "NLRB Rules Union Guilty of Charge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 20, 1967; "Masonite Strike Over, Firm, Union Agree," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 8, 1967; "High Court Upholds Civil Contempt Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 11, 1967; "Announce Terms Settling Strike: 250 Report To Sign Up," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 12, 1967, Masonite Strike Folder, Masonite Verticle File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM].

The FBI had grave concerns about their star witness, Billy Roy Pitts, however, as he had not fared well under federal protection. By December Pitts was desperately lonely in Cincinnati, and he begged agents to move him to Houston or Baton Rouge. When they refused, he sneaked back to Mississippi and contacted Jesse White. That night, when White drove to his meeting with Pitts at the home of Pitts' father, a Klansman followed White and shot out his windows. White immediately notified the Laurel police and received an escort to his home in Jackson. When Pitts contacted White again, White warned him to find a motel and stay off the streets. Instead, Pitts contacted his longtime friend and former Klan brother, Charles Lamar Lowe. Apparently Lowe had forgiven Pitts for testifying against him in his Klan trial a year earlier. Pitts convinced Lowe to meet with FBI agents in a dark parking lot in Jackson to discuss the possibility of becoming a state witness. Lowe hated Bowers and Nix for orchestrating his expulsion from the Klan, but he hated the FBI more; after a brief discussion with agents, he refused to meet with them again. Although disappointed with the lost opportunity, agents still had Pitts, and they moved him to Houston. The Laurel Klavern grew irate over the failed attempt to murder White and Pitts. DABURN suspect Lester Thornton told his Klan brothers that he was less concerned about White's informant status because he knew nothing about the DABURN incident, but Pitts possessed information that "could hurt."¹⁷

Still, despite the threat of Pitts, Bowers' secret cell persisted in its operation. Four days before Christmas 1967, Tarrant drove Bowers through the dark rainy streets of

¹⁷ Quoting FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 7, 1968, Lester Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-96; FBI Report, December 16, 1967, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-196; FBI Report, December 21, 1967, Lowe FBI File, vol. 2, #157-4387-116; Benjamin F. Graves to SAC, Jackson, January 18, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-207, all in Helfrich Papers.

Collins, located some 30 miles west of Laurel in Covington County. Tarrants careened recklessly through the town before parking at a closed gas station. Unknowingly, he caught the attention of a night marshal, Buster Lott, who noticed the vehicle's Alabama license plates and wondered what business the driver had in his small town that night. When Lott pulled the men over and took their license, he recognized Sam Bowers. What were they doing in his town, Lott wanted to know. Bowers arrogantly responded that he had come to "take care of" Ance McLaurin, a black man indicted for taking a gun from a Mt. Olive night marshal. Lott arrested the men on reckless driving charges.¹⁸

When Lott searched the vehicle, he added another charge—possession of unauthorized concealed weapons. Authorities confiscated a High Band Conversion Model Transistor Radio Receiver, a handbook entitled *Instruction and guerrilla warfare*, two empty .45 ammunition boxes, and an M-3 .45 caliber "grease gun," which was neither licensed nor registered. The arrest made Tarrants visible, for it linked him with Bowers and the Klan. The first porthole into Bowers' secret cell opened with the arrest, though it would take time before authorities realized that they had found the mysterious bomber. After authorities released Tarrants on bond, Tarrants skipped town, slipped underground, and disappeared from law enforcement radar. A biracial jury found Bowers innocent on the charges of possession of an automatic weapon, despite testimony from Lott that Bowers had come to Collins armed with a high powered gun and the explicit

¹⁸ Quoting "Sam Bowers Acquitted on Gun Charge," *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-934; FBI Report, December 22, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-89[?], both in Helfrich Papers. *State of Mississippi v. Thomas C. Tarrants* (1968) case no. 1534, *Covington County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 3, 82-83, Collins Circuit Court, Collins, Mississippi; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 79; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 286-287.

purpose of harming McLaurin.¹⁹

Bowers must have experienced a sense of invincibility after the acquittal, though he had much to worry about in the DABURN and MIBURN cases. In December, District Attorney Finch called a special session of the grand jury. The local press speculated that state indictments in the Dahmer case were imminent. A week later, U. S. District Court Judge Harold Cox sentenced the seven convicted men in the Neshoba case. Only Sam Bowers and Alton Wayne Roberts received the maximum 10 years. Again Judge Cox permitted Bowers to post bond pending an appeal. Free again to launch terror attacks, Bowers instructed his men to launch a winter bombing campaign. The Klansmen collected dynamite and prepared to bomb several targets in Jackson. Agents learned of their plans and instructed all informants to find out the location of the targets, but they failed. In early January 1968, Tarrants' group bombed two black churches in Meridian.²⁰ Throughout 1967 the Klan battles seemed to favor Bowers and his White Knights, but court costs, negative publicity, and betrayals by disgruntled Klansmen weakened the Invisible Empire. In 1968 the FBI and local authorities prepared a doomsday attack against the hooded order.

In Mississippi, 1968 proved to be a trying year as the white establishment

¹⁹ Quoting "Sam Bowers Acquitted on Gun Charge," *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-934; FBI Report by SAC K. Moore, December 22, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-89[?], both in Helfrich Papers. Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 79; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 286-287.

²⁰ "Special Grand Jury Slated," *Hattiesburg American*, December 22, 1967; "Bowers Gets 10 Years in Prison," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 30, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-904; William F. Dukes to SAC, Jackson, November 23, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-867; SAC, Jackson to FBI File, December 6, 1967, Bowers FBI File, vol. 6, #157-18-883, all in Helfrich Papers. "Sam Bowers Gets 10 Years," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 29, 1967; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, 106.

employed more covert forms of racial oppression to sustain Jim Crow. During the gubernatorial inaugural festivities on January 16, John Bell Williams, who had easily defeated his Republican opponent to win the governor's office the previous November, set the tenor for his administration when he promised to fight federal encroachment. Although Williams condemned Klan lawlessness, described its acts of terror as "cowardly crimes and atrocities," and warned that Klansmen could not "find comfort in this Administration," he blamed the violence on the "provocation" of black activists. Despite MFDP's first significant political victories—as black candidates it supported had won 24 positions, including seven on the state level, in the November 1967 election—Williams refused to surrender the fight against black liberation. He pledged to use the law rather than brute force to terminate the intrusion of "a dictatorial federal bureaucracy." Only then might states reclaim autonomy and proclaim themselves unwilling to become "mere provinces of the federal government."²¹ In other words, Williams planned to employ nonviolent tactics to sustain white control. Williams did not realize it yet, but it was too late to effectively sustain the white tyranny with nonviolence. Klan brutality had drawn the federal government deep into the state, and by 1968, it was too intricately entwined in the war against the police state to retreat. Local authorities in south Mississippi did not realize it either, and they clung to the hope that if they cooperated, the FBI would destroy the Klan but leave their white supremacist system intact.

On January 17, 1968, the FBI and local prosecutors set the tone for their new

²¹ Quoting William Winter, January 16, 1968, *Mississippi Senate Journal* (Jackson 1968), 38; *Ibid.*, 35-39. State of Mississippi General Election Returns, November 7, 1967, Evelyn Gandy Papers, McCain, USM; "Vote In Jones Sets A Record," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 8, 1967; James Saggus, "Mississippi Elects Williams Governor," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 8, 1967; "Negroes Win 7 State Offices," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 8, 1967.

alliance against the Invisible Empire with a Klan trial in Covington County, located 30 miles west of Laurel. Local authorities tried Billy Carr for the spring 1966 assault, battery, and attempted murder of his fellow Klansman T. W. Rogers. After the attack, Rogers had agreed to become an informant. When the jury returned its verdict, theirs was the first finding of guilt against a Klansman on state charges in Mississippi. In Forrest County, on January 23, the Department of Justice called Byrd as a witness before the grand jury in the Dahmer case. Attorneys hoped that he would affirm his confession before the jurors. When Byrd invoked the Fifth Amendment, the Department of Justice indicted Byrd in the DABURN case for conspiracy to commit arson. Despite Byrd's refusal to testify for the FBI, the Klan remained resentful and suspicious toward him. Talk of murdering Byrd continued to circulate among Klansmen, even as state and local authorities prepared to arrest the DABURN suspects. On Wednesday, January 24, Pitts pled guilty to charges of murder and arson before U. S. District Judge Cox in a Jackson federal court. Cox accepted the plea but delayed sentencing.²²

The indictments stemming from Pitts' testimony in the state cases, save one, hardly shocked the public, for all but one of the accused had been indicted previously on federal charges or in other Klan cases. Many residents, however, found the involvement of Charles Clifford Wilson nearly unbelievable. A day before the grand jury met, on

²² SAC, Jackson to Director, February 7, 1968, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-239; SAC Jackson, Memo, July 10, 1968, Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-252; FBI Report, "Truman Weber Rogers," n. d., FBI File, vol. [?], #44-1512-4799; FBI Report, July 22, 1968, FBI File 44-31694-[?], Defense Exhibits, all in Helfrich Papers. "KKK Member: Carr," *Hattiesburg American*, January 17, 1968; *State of Mississippi v. Billy Carr, Jesse White, and Cecil Sessum* (1967-1970) case nos. 1502, 1510, *Covington County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 3, 76, Collins Circuit Court, Collins, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Carr, White, Sessum* (1967-1970)].

Monday January 22, local Jaycees had honored Wilson with the Distinguished Service Award at the Pinehurst Hotel for his contributions to the Jones County community. At the ceremony, the featured speaker, Dr. Robert Marsh, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Laurel, who had publicly condemned Klan violence several months earlier, stated that the “essence of a good community is good people. . . . We need to . . . have a constructive influence in our community. People are realizing the questions of morality must be squarely faced.” Marsh concluded, “we need more men like Clifford Wilson—men willing to put the good of the community over their own interests and desires.” The next day, authorities arrested Wilson and charged him with arson and the murder of Vernon Dahmer. By Friday, January 26, the state had arrested and charged Sam Bowers, Travis Buckley, Deavours Nix, Lawrence Byrd, and Howard Travis Giles with arson; and Cecil Sessum, Henry DeBoxtel, Charles Clifford Wilson, Franklin Lyons, William Thomas Smith, Lester Thornton, and Charles Noble with arson and murder. All of the accused pled innocent. Those men charged with murder were held without bond. On Saturday, January 27, Nix, Byrd, Bowers, and Buckley posted bond.²³

When Laurel’s elite and middling citizens read of Wilson’s arrest, they likely stared at the front page of their newspapers in shock. They knew that Bowers had eschewed his elite background and surrounded himself with “South Mississippi’s redneck underworld.” But Wilson, the Jaycee Man of the year, owned and ran the Laurel Limb

²³ Quoting Marsh, *The Last Day*, 152. “Laurel Jaycees Present Award,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 23, 1968; “4 Defendants are Released,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 27, 1968; “Bowers, 9 Others Remain in Jail,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 27, 1968; “‘Break’ Brings 12 Indictments,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 26, 1968. FBI Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, March 7, 1968, Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-96; SAC, Roy Moore to Director J. Edgar Hoover, February 1, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 42, #44-1512-3487, both in Helfrich Papers.

and Brace Company housed in an impressive brick building. He belonged to the country club and vacationed with his family in South Florida. He seemed like one of their own. Reverend Marsh ruminated over the news, for he had just lauded the man as a living saint the night before. He decided it was time to leave Laurel and its terrors behind. Since signing his name to the resolution against the Klan, he had received strange phone calls and threats. Marsh had desperately wanted to become a powerful voice against racism, but his fear of white supremacist retribution frightened him. He began looking for jobs outside of Mississippi.²⁴

Like Marsh, many moderate and even conservative whites in Forrest County had publicly turned against the Klan. Journalist Elliott Chaze of the *Hattiesburg American* reported that most community members were grateful for the arrests of Dahmer's killers, as they believed the accused men should face more severe charges than federal civil rights violations. Chaze argued that the state indictments revealed a phenomenal development in Mississippi. He pointed out that a few years earlier such action against Klansmen would have resulted in "political suicide for the prosecutors and public ostracism for members of the grand jury and anyone else connected with pressing the case." District Attorney Finch responded positively to the new attitude: "I believe [the arrests] establish that Mississippi stands ready to defend the rights of its people regardless of the color of their skins." He was half right. Many Mississippians were tired of the violence and demanded change. But many others refused to surrender white supremacist rule.²⁵

²⁴ Quoting, Marsh, *The Last Days*, 156, *Ibid.*, 165-167.

Despite the arrests in the Dahmer case, Klansmen continued to launch terror attacks. Local NAACP activists, including Dr. C. E. and Jeanette Smith, suffered violent reprisals for their role in leading the 1967 summer boycott. For years, the Klan had made threatening telephone calls to the Smith's home. One night in the winter of 1968, someone hurled a dead skunk into their front yard. A caller played the sound of a clock ticking to convey a death threat. Jeanette Smith calmly goaded the caller to "come on down, I'm ready for you. . . .The whole community is ready for you. You won't come down this street no more." On the morning of February 20, Klansmen drove by the Smith's house. They shot up the Smith's vehicle and shot out all the front windows of their home. One of the bullets landed inches away from their sleeping son.²⁶ As had become the Klan's modus operandi in the White Knights' war against the civil rights activists and the federal government, the Klan used terror against blacks like the Smiths to stymie activism.

On the propaganda front, the Klan and the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR) held defense fund rallies at which speakers portrayed the federal government as a communist controlled tyranny and the White Knights as the protectors of white Christians and the free world. At one of these rallies, Bowers declared that "the FBI, antichrist system of Nicholas Katzenbach" had invaded Mississippi to deny whites their freedom, and the agents planned to "slaughter" white Christians "on the altar for a nigger revolution." Many prominent citizens attended these rallies and gave money to the

²⁵ Quoting Elliott Chaze, "11 Charged," *Hattiesburg American*, January 25, 1968; "Mistrial Declared," *Hattiesburg American*, March 22, 1968.

²⁶ Quoting Jeanette Smith, interview. Winfred Moncrief, C. E. Smith, photograph, February 20, 1968, Moncrief Photograph Collection, MDAH Digital Archives.

cause. Former gubernatorial candidate Jimmy Swan spoke in support of the defendants. Bowers and his Klansmen hoped to sway, or coerce the public to their side, as they faced a series of trials in 1968, beginning with Travis Buckley, who in February stood trial a second time for his part in Watkins' kidnapping.²⁷

The Klan grew worried when days before Buckley's trial, Judge Darwin Maples sentenced Pitts to five years in prison for the Watkins kidnapping to run concurrently with his upcoming federal sentencing in the DABURN case. Authorities sent Pitts to the federal prison in Texarkana, Texas to begin serving his five year sentence. Judge Maples was forced to postpone Buckley's trial briefly when he learned that the defendant had allegedly tampered with the jury. An irate Maples quashed the jury panel, summoned new jurors for Buckley's trial, and recalled the grand jury to investigate charges of jury tampering. The grand jury handed down two more indictments against Buckley—obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice. The grand jury also indicted Buckley's attorney, Albert Sidney Johnson, II, on charges of conspiracy to obstruct justice. Despite testimony by juror Keith Belcher that Buckley had tried to bribe him in return for exoneration on the kidnapping charges, a biracial jury found Buckley not guilty.²⁸

²⁷ Quoting "Killed by the Klan." Robert Edward Lee to SAC, Jackson, September 23, 1968, Thornton FBI File, vol. 1, #157-4361-111, Helfrich Papers; "Mistrial Declared," *Hattiesburg American*, March 22, 1968; "Travis Buckley's Kidnap Trial," n. d., Vernon F. Dahmer Collection, McCain Library and Archives, USM, [hereinafter cited as Dahmer Collection].

²⁸ "Pitts Gets Five Years for Kidnap," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 6, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-211; Benjamin F. Graves, to SAC, Jackson, February 5, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-212, both in Helfrich Papers. "Travis Buckley's Kidnap Trial," n. d., Dahmer Collection; "Buckley Awaits Kidnap Sentence," *Laurel*

During Buckley's kidnapping trial, which finally began on February 6, Pitts testified that he and Buckley and three other men had abducted and assaulted Watkins. Pitts acknowledged that he had given false testimony in Buckley's first trial the previous March. He explained that, prior to the March 1967 trial, Buckley had called Pitts into the office of Klan attorney Charles Blackwell and presented him with a five-page statement that he expected Pitts to memorize and repeat in court when called to testify. Buckley warned Pitts that if he failed to comply, "Sam and them will take care of you." On February 8, the jurors found Buckley guilty. Still, Buckley avoided jail. His lawyers won a motion to commit Buckley to Whitfield for a psychiatric examination before the sentencing hearing. Several months later, Judge Maples sentenced Buckley to 10 years in prison and disbarred him; then he freed him on a \$25,000 bond pending his appeal. Like many white conservatives and moderates, Maples could not castigate and punish Klansmen without disparaging the black struggle. During sentencing, he denounced Buckley for his "unethical acts" and stated that "in my opinion you have affirmed the same practices of a group of people who set themselves above the law—Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown." Still, Buckley's conviction proved a promising start for the Klan trials in the Dahmer case. On March 8, Pitts arrived under heavy guard at the Forrest County Circuit Court where he pled guilty to arson and murder. Judge Stanton Hall accepted the plea but delayed sentencing.²⁹

Leader-Call, February 9, 1968; "Buckley Gets Sanity Test," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 10, 1968; "Buckley Gets 10-Year Term," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 3, 1968.

²⁹ First quote, "Jury Finds Buckley Guilty," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 8, 1968; all other quotes, "Buckley Gets 10-Year Term," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 3, 1968. "Buckley Gets Sanity Test," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 10, 1968; "Judge Sets Trial

When jury selection for Cecil Sessum's trial began on Monday, March 11, 1968, court officials imposed strict security measures because prosecutors believed that their star witness, Billy Roy Pitts, was vulnerable to a Klan attack, and because prosecutors and agents had received threats and even attacks. On several occasions, anonymous callers had threatened to blow up the Dukes' home. On another occasion, Klansmen slipped a poisonous snake into an FBI agent's vehicle. Law enforcement officials reserved the courtroom balcony so officers could watch the Klansmen attending the trial, and authorities subjected all spectators to personal searches and stationed armed guards throughout the courtroom. The precautions proved necessary. Early Monday morning, police seized a gun from Mary Sessum, who had reconciled with her husband Cecil. Tensions were palpable inside and outside the courthouse.³⁰

The national and local media flooded the courthouse to cover the first Klan murder trial in Mississippi. Local journalist Elliott Chaze noted that out-of-town reporters seemed shocked by the intriguing local characters. During jury selection, Judge Stanton Hall took part in his usual "on-the-job hobby" of whittling cedar sticks. The theatrical district attorney, James Finch, insisted on minimal air conditioning because of recurring health problems with his larynx. He told the constable, "You turn that thing up and I won't be able to talk." Sweaty out-of-towners appeared bewildered, but the perspiring

Dates," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 29, 1968; "Buckley Loses," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 25, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Pitts Pleads Guilty," *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 1968.

³⁰ "Selection of Jury," *Hattiesburg American*, March 11, 1968; Elliot Chaze, "Jury Completed," *Hattiesburg American*, March 12, 1968; Jack Nelson, "Tough Prosecution Led to Convictions," *Hattiesburg American*, March 19, 1995, Dahmer Collection; James K. Dukes, speech, August 29, 2000, "Pursuing a Late Justice: The Prosecution of Mississippi's Civil Rights Murders, Then and Now," videocassette, McCain Library and Archives, [hereinafter cited as Dukes, "Pursuing a Late Justice"]; James K. Dukes, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording.

locals were amused, as they were accustomed to Finch's eccentric ways. The local people had seen Finch begin a trial appearing pale and sickly and then suddenly "the great voice rumbles and Finch half-swallowing to sharpen" an "already-sharp chin line . . . begins slugging it out with the defense." Along with reporters, 17 whites and 37 blacks including the Dahmer family and Kerry Fielder, and civil rights leaders, including Reverend John Barnes, Reverend J. C. Killingsworth, and Father Peter Quinn, arrived to watch the preliminary hearings. Sessum, flanked by his lawyers, Percy Quinn and Lawrence Arrington, expected an acquittal and appeared calm.³¹

The Klan underestimated the changes that had occurred in Forrest County. The fervor that Dukes and Finch displayed in their prosecution of the case reflected the transition of Mississippi justice as both men possessed long records of using the courts to preserve white supremacy. Dukes later claimed that he diligently prosecuted Dahmer's killers because "it's my home. I didn't then and I don't now believe in anarchy or mob rule. I came from a family of law enforcement officers, and, hell, it just wasn't right." Yet neither he nor his family had always subscribed to such beliefs. His father, while serving as a police officer in Hattiesburg, had belonged to the Klan. For his part, Dukes, along with Finch, had ensured that many civil rights activists suffered under the strong arm of Forrest County's racial injustice. Hattiesburg racism had long survived off the radar of national attention. Finally, the Dahmer murder had unveiled the tortured racial struggles

³¹ Quoting Elliott Chaze, "Jury Completed for Sessum," *Hattiesburg American*, March 12, 1968. Elliott Chaze, "Selection of Sessum Jury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 12, 1968; "Selection of Jury," *Hattiesburg American*, March 11, 1968; Kerry Fielder, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), October 4, 2001, MOHP recording; Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 71; L. E. Cole, MSSC Report, May 1, 1968, SCR #2-30-0-77-1-1-1; Lee Cole, MSSC Report, March 18, 1968, SCR #2-64-2-10-1-1-1; Lee Cole, MSSC Report, May 1968, SCR #2-64-2-14-1-1-1, all at MDAH.

that wracked Forrest County. If prosecutors failed to prosecute the Dahmer cases vigorously, they would make Hattiesburg a safe haven for Klan lawlessness. In the mid to late sixties, city and county authorities across Mississippi faced a choice: investigate and fairly prosecute Klan attacks or confront the wrath of an intensified federal war and all the national condemnation accompanying such negative publicity. Forrest County leaders, unlike their white counterparts in Neshoba, chose law and order. They had cooperated with the FBI investigation, helped infiltrate the local klaverns, and with the Sessum trial, appeared ready to strike their first crippling blow against the Invisible Empire. In 1968 the Dahmer state cases had the power to instigate a significant shift in the Mississippi justice system. Throughout the trials, activism in the streets faded as activists packed the courtrooms. Still, the racial landscape remained tense, and the Spirit reinitiated armed patrols in black communities.³²

Although no one in Forrest County expected a conviction, when Dukes and Finch entered the courtroom and began the voir dire examinations, they forced spectators to question that presumption. Finch and Dukes realized that seating a racially unbiased jury was a formidable, if not impossible task. During voir dire examinations, they sought to strike the most biased jurors from the panel and to instill in the remaining jurors the importance of reaching a verdict based on evidence rather than race. Finch, an intense, 49-year-old whose “tactics have the severity and righteousness of a country preacher,” approached each juror and pointed his “bony finger” in each of their faces and demanded

³² Quoting Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Case Key in Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991, Dahmer Collection. William F. Dukes, interview by Orley Caudill, January 23, 1973, MOHP Digital; Lee Cole, MSSC Report, May 1968, SCR #2-64-2-14-1-1-1; Lee Cole, Hattiesburg, MSSC Report, May 23, 1968, SCR# 99-2-0-41-1-1-1; Lee Cole, to Director of the Sovereignty Commission, July 16, 1968, SCR #99-48-0-17-1-1-1, all at MDAH.

to know if they “believe any person or group has the right to violate the law of Mississippi just because of their race?” He also asked jurors if they could “blind” themselves to the fact that the defendant was white and the victim “colored” and “place no more burden of proof on the state than if the defendant were a Negro and the dead man was white?” Because the prosecutors realized that many local whites perceived the trial as another federal conspiracy to invade and control Mississippians and dismantle the southern way of life, Finch belabored the point that Mississippi, not the federal government, was prosecuting Sessum. With the jury pool nearly selected, the defense used one of its peremptory challenges to strike the only remaining African American on the panel. By Tuesday afternoon, the attorneys had selected an all-white, male jury composed mainly of working-class men.³³

The prosecution led with emotional testimony from Ellie Dahmer. As she spoke, Sessum, who had remained generally passive throughout the preliminary proceedings, stopped chewing his gum and stared at her intently. Dahmer recalled for the court that shotgun blasts and a sudden roaring fire had awakened her on the night of the attack. She told the court of the acrid, suffocating odor that permeated the house as the family desperately tried to escape. She explained that her daughter and husband sustained severe burns from the fire and that her husband had died from those burns the next day. Dahmer choked back tears when prosecutors showed her a picture of her home prior to the fire and then a picture of the home in ashes. After detailed testimony by FBI agents regarding the physical evidence, prosecutors began the process of tying Cecil Sessum to the

³³ First second, and third, quotes Elliott Chaze, “Selection of Sessum Jury,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 12, 1968; all other quotes, “Selection of Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 11, 1968. Elliot Chaze, “Jury Completed for Sessum,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 12, 1968; “This is Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1968.

murder.

Former Klansman Truman Webber Rogers drew the spectators into the machinations of the Invisible Empire with his matter-of-fact testimony about Klansmen gathering in pastures and barns to plan the killing. Rogers identified Sessum as Exalted Cyclops of the Laurel Klavern and testified that he along with Sessum had attended meetings in September, October, and December at which the Klan discussed murdering Dahmer. He revealed that Sam Bowers, Cecil Sessum, Charles Nobles, Franklin Lyons, Henry DeBoxtel, and Travis Giles had attended the meeting when Bowers said, “something has got to be done about this damned nigger down south.” At the first meeting, Bowers became angry, “fussing and cussing that he wanted . . . the hit . . . done and wanted it done right.” The Klansmen began to argue “whether it would be a three . . . a fire . . . or a four . . . death.” They decided on a number four—elimination. In December, Rogers accompanied Sessum on a dry-run of the Dahmer property. On cross-examination, Arrington tried to portray Rogers as a liar who had never belonged to the Klan but had made up his testimony because FBI agents paid him to testify. When Arrington asked Rogers if he possessed any written record of his membership, he responded, “they don’t keep no records, you know that . . . the ones in the groups outside in the pastures at night is the only ones that’s supposed to know” the names of the other members.³⁴

Rogers had provided the first glimpse into the Invisible Empire in which Sessum

³⁴ Quoting, Truman Weber Rogers Testimony, *State of Mississippi v. Cecil Sessum* (1968), case no. 45,174, 297-300, 310; Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968)]; *Ibid.*, 294-296, 301, T. W. Rogers, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers; “FBI Identifies Giles Vehicle,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 13, 1968; Elliott Chaze, “Car Brought into Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1968.

and his cohorts conspired to murder Dahmer. The prosecutors hoped to place Sessum at the center of the conspiracy by introducing his confession to the FBI. The defense objected. Outside the presence of the jury, Sessum testified that Agents William Dukes and J. L. Martin had abducted him from Byrd's farm and transported him to the Holiday Inn where Agent Dukes beat him with his fists and a blackjack. When Sessum still refused to sign the confession which they had produced, Dukes said, "We've gone too far with him to turn back now, we'll have to kill him." Agents transported Sessum to Dahmer's grave where they held a gun to his head and threatened to kill him unless he signed the confession. When Sessum still refused, they released him, but they threatened to kill him if he mentioned the incident to anyone. Agent Martin rebutted Sessum's testimony. He testified that "Sessum's conscience troubled him, and after a midnight pilgrimage to Dahmer's flower-covered grave, Sessum confessed to the FBI in a motel room." Dukes and Martin both produced FBI logs that detailed the Sessum meeting, including the time and location of every interaction, but when they tried to reveal the contents of Sessum's statements such as his admission that he belonged to the Klan, Arrington successfully objected. Arrington pointed out repeatedly that Dukes and Martin were large men, standing over six feet tall and weighing some 200 pounds while Sessum was a "a little fellow." Arrington concluded that the agents beat Sessum to coerce a false confession.³⁵

During Finch's cross-examination of Sessum, he inquired, "what doctor did you go to for treatment after this beating you took?" Sessum replied that he decided against

³⁵ First quote, Unsigned Statement of Cecil V. Sessum, Defense Exhibit D-94, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 248-249, [hereinafter cited as Sessum, statement, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968)]; third quote Ibid., 206, 233; Ibid., 207-221, 233, 237-239, 242-249; second quote, "Pitts Testifies," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 14, 1968.

visiting a doctor as he feared the agents would kill him. Finch pointed out that despite this alleged brutal beating from a 200-pound agent, Sessum was well enough to work the next day as a traveling salesman. Finch inquired, “Well then if you were so afraid why did you publish and distribute all over the country this purported affidavit that your lawyer referred to?” Sessum responded that after a few days, he “gained courage to publish it.” Sessum, Finch emphasized, claimed that agents threatened to kill him if he refused to sign the statement if he talked; yet, Sessum was still very much alive. After the heated exchange, the judge asked Finch for a legal argument to introduce the confession. The contents of the discussion remain unknown as the record resumes with Finch withdrawing his request to introduce the confession.³⁶ Prosecutors still had a strong case with Billy Roy Pitts.

When the 21 United States Marshals protecting Billy Roy Pitts rushed the star witness into the courtroom, Arrington commented, Pitts was “worth a lot to them—alive.” Smooth and calm on the stand, Pitts provided chilling testimony as he explained in detail the plans to murder Vernon Dahmer and the execution of Bowers’ orders. Pitts identified Sessum as the Exalted Cyclops who “quarterbacked” the attack. On January 9, 1966, Pitts and seven other Klansmen had congregated at the home of Sessum’s parents. The Klansmen checked their weapons while Sessum filled plastic jugs with gasoline from his father’s service station pump. When they arrived at the Dahmer farm, DeBoxtel, Noble, Thornton, and Lyons attacked the store. The Sessum crew drove to the house, and they “all jumped out of the car. Bill Smith and Cliff Wilson began firing. There were no lights in the house. Cecil and I ran up to the house. I squatted down in front of the brick

³⁶ Quoting Sessum, statement, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 250-253; *Ibid.*, 250-257.

front. . . . Cecil began jabbing holes in the plastic jugs and threw five of them inside After he lit the torch he threw it inside and ignited the gas from the jugs. I heard the voice of someone in the house. . . . it sounded like a man. Cecil said let him die.”³⁷

Pitts’ testimony served as the most important element of the state’s case. As a former Klansmen who had participated in the attack, not only could Pitts identify all of the perpetrators, but his testimony also corroborated the evidence and accounts by other witnesses. He testified that the Klan had used gasoline jugs from Sessum’s service station to set the fires. Ellie Dahmer recalled seeing a gasoline jug in the bed of the family pickup truck that did not belong to her family, and agents and investigators recovered the jug. Pitts noted that he had dropped his .22 caliber magnum revolver in front of the picture window, and agents found his pistol in that exact area of the crime scene. The location of the shotgun shell casings at the crime scene matched Pitts’ description of the position of the shooters. Pitts testified that Smith shot the tires out of Giles’ 1953 Ford Galaxie 500 vehicle, forcing the Klansmen to abandon it on Monroe Road; the FBI found the vehicle where Pitts recalled leaving it with a flat tire and the body riddled with bullet holes. Pitts’ testimony corroborated Rogers’ rendition of the planning sessions, further validating the state’s case. Finally, J. B. Smith, a white neighbor of the Dahmer family, helped solidify Pitts’ testimony. He recalled that right before the attack, he saw two vehicles of white men, including Cecil Sessum, heading toward the Dahmer farm. After the attack, one of the vehicles, packed full of men, including Sessum, passed his home

³⁷ First quote, Elliott Chaze, “Sessum is Convicted,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968; second quote, Elliott Chaze, “Defense Tries Hard to Discredit Pitts,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 15, 1968; all other quotes, Billy Roy Pitts Testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968) vol. 3, Billy Roy Pitts, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. Elliott Chaze, “Pitts Puts Finger on Sessum,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 14, 1968; “Defense Attacks Pitts Testimony,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 15, 1968.

again heading in the opposite direction. As a white man who seemed reluctant to testify, Smith proved an important part of the state's case.³⁸

The defense hoped to discredit Pitts' compelling testimony by portraying him as "the paid liar of the government," a womanizer, and an unfaithful husband. Arrington implied that Pitts had turned state's witness for financial interests after becoming upset with Klan members. Pitts admitted that he had received around \$1,600 from the FBI, but he noted that the FBI had paid him to relocate his family "so that they wouldn't be murdered in their homes" and to settle the medical costs of his ulcer treatment. Pitts also insisted that the prosecution never promised him anything in exchange for his testimony. Pitts denied Arrington's accusations that he had lived with a mistress in Mississippi or that he currently lived with a mistress in Texas. Throughout Pitts' testimony, Sessum appeared impassive. Wearing a light-colored suit and vigorously chewing gum, he watched Pitts and occasionally wrote a note on yellow paper. When marshals escorted Pitts from the room, Sessum turned his head and watched him leave.³⁹

The state rested after Pitts testified, and the defense brought in a series of witnesses who either defamed Pitts' character or contradicted his testimony. Several defense witnesses stated that Pitts told them that the FBI had promised to reward him

³⁸ Pitts Testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 412-454; Agent James W. Awe Testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 133-163, James W. Awe, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as Awe testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968)]; "Defense Attacks Pitts Testimony," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 15, 1968; "FBI Identifies Giles Vehicle," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 13, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Car Brought into Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, March 13, 1968; "DeBoxtel was on Dahmer 'Dry Run,'" *Hattiesburg American*, March 20, 1968; "Pitts Testifies," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 14, 1968; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 238-239.

³⁹ First quote, Elliott Chaze, "Sessum is Convicted," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968; second quote, Pitts Testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 453; *Ibid.*, 455-478; "Defense Attacks Pitts Testimony," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 15, 1968.

financially if he would divulge information about the Dahmer murder, but he admitted to them that he lacked knowledge of the Dahmer killing. Former gubernatorial candidate, Jimmy Swan, testified that he had attended a defense rally at which he heard Pitts state that he was innocent of the charges against him. On cross-examination, Swan denied his Klan membership, but he admitted that he had spoken at a fund-raising dinner for the defendants. When Swan left the stand, Arrington said to him, "Thank you, Governor." The most important defense witness, Sessum's mother, Velma, provided her son with an alibi when she claimed that he had stayed with her on the night of the attack. She insisted that he only briefly left their home at 1:00 a.m. to bring gasoline from the family service station to Ralph Strickland and James Yount, who had run out of gas, but he was at home when the Dahmer attack occurred. Strickland and Yount confirmed her account. On cross examination, Strickland admitted that he was a former commander of a white supremacist group, the Knights of the Cross of the Ku Klux Klan, and he conceded that Younts was a member. Arrington also tried to prove that Dahmer died of poor treatment in the hospital rather than the result of fire.⁴⁰

For the most part, Arrington hoped to achieve an acquittal for his client by appealing to jurors' commitment to states' rights and white supremacy and their fear of a federal government conspiracy to destroy the white South. He had a perfect jury for the argument—all white southern males. During cross-examination of federal agent James Awe, Arrington focused much of his questioning on Awe's Yankee background and his association with the federal government. He elicited from Awe that he hailed from Nebraska, had received his law degree from Georgetown in Washington D. C., had spent

⁴⁰ Quoting Elliott Chaze, "Defense Tries," *Hattiesburg American*, March 15, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Sessum is Convicted," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968.

much of his career in Ohio, and had only lived in Mississippi since the latter part of 1964. In other words, Awe was an outsider, an invader, not to be trusted. Arrington tried to force Awe to testify that the FBI investigated the entire case, but Awe insisted that the FBI agents and local authorities cooperated in their state and federal investigations. Arrington inquired why it took two years for Sessum to face a trial when Awe completed all the crime scene work in 1966, stating, “Now let’s see. I believe 1968 is a presidential election year, isn’t it?” Dukes objected and Finch demanded, “Now what has that got to do with this case?” The court allowed Awe to answer affirmatively. Of course, it had nothing to do with the case, but Arrington hoped to convince the jurors that the Democrats were using the Mississippi case to curry black votes in the presidential election.⁴¹

In his closing argument, Arrington persisted with the federal conspiracy angle as he sought to divert the jury’s attention from the murder of Dahmer and toward the issue of Mississippi sovereignty and federal intervention. Arrington demanded that the jurors acquit Sessum if they wanted “Washington D.C. and the Department of Justice to know how Forrest County feels about running its own affairs.” He once again claimed that the federal government had a political interest in the trial’s outcome. He alleged that politicians delayed the trials so that defendants were tried during “a presidential election year” to insinuate that the state prosecuted Sessum for political purposes. He argued that an acquittal would hurt President Johnson in the polls and put George Wallace, “the little man from Alabama [,] in the show.” Arrington implied that if the jury acquitted Sessum, Wallace, a white Southern segregationist, might have a chance to become president of the

⁴¹ Awe Testimony, *Mississippi v. Sessum* (1968), 212; *Ibid.*, 209-216.

United States.⁴²

The prosecutors also used the states' rights issue in their closing arguments. Finch declared that "I told the government to back off, that I wanted to try it. I said give me a Forrest County jury. They won't put up with this stuff." With this strategy, Finch sought to deny Arrington's claims that the federal government controlled the trial. He emphasized that the trial took place in a Mississippi state court; it was prosecuted by native Mississippians; and it was heard by a Mississippi jury. He also appealed to the jurors' pride in Forrest County and their xenophobia of outsiders who tarnished their county name when he encouraged them to prevent the Jones County Klansmen from usurping dictatorial power over their county. Dukes also portrayed Klan leaders as arbitrary dictators and claimed that the case was one of "organized society versus Cecil Sessum." He concluded that "with Sam Bowers acting as judge and Cecil Sessum as prosecutor . . . they tried Vernon Dahmer in his absence and carried out the verdict of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan."⁴³

At 4:50 p.m. on Friday, the jury began deliberations. According to juror Ray William Wells, he and his fellow jurors knew that the prosecution had overwhelmingly proved its case and that Sessum had indeed murdered Dahmer. Still, they struggled over the verdict. They were generally segregationists, who viewed civil rights activists as their enemies; besides, "it wasn't very popular back in them days for a white person to convict a white person for killing a black." Wells, like most Forrest County whites, abhorred the Civil Rights Movement. Mostly whites feared that the Movement would result in a black

⁴² Elliott Chaze, "Sessum is Convicted," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

coup of Mississippi government and a reversal of racial power; and they worried that such a development would lead to the result that terrified southern whites most—miscegenation. The Klan also terrified the jurors. As Wells remembered, “You feared that maybe a bunch of the radicals or rednecks would come get you. . . . that could happen.” While listening to the testimony Wells decided that Klansmen were “just mean, cruel people.” Although he supported segregation he, like many other whites, disapproved of violence. He later remarked, “I know in Hattiesburg that most of the people I knew thought [the murder of Dahmer] was a dastardly thing to do, because even though we didn’t believe in voter rights for blacks that was beside the point. This is a question of life and death and it just wasn’t right.” Dahmer also enjoyed a different reputation than most black activists—he seemed to them more moderate, more reasonable, and whites genuinely respected him.⁴⁴

The turning of white city leaders and citizens against the Klan greatly influenced Wells’ perspective. Finch, a “typical Southern lawyer,” diligently prosecuted the defendant, which convinced Wells to consider the case seriously. Finch knew how to talk to southerners—he understood how to convince them to choose the law over fealty to white supremacy. Eyewitness J. B. Smith also moved Wells, because the white farmer so obviously “didn’t want to tell on Sessum . . . But Jim [Finch] . . . drug it out of him.” As Wells recalled, Finch reminded the jury during closing arguments that “y’all can look at the old man. You know he’s honest as the day is long. Now he didn’t want to tell on Mr. Sessum but y’all know, y’all know he recognized him, and that he first didn’t want to tell

⁴⁴ Ray William “Buck” Wells, interview by Lawrence Kight, May 6, 1997, vol. 697, MOHP, 63-68. Elliott Chaze, “Sessum is Convicted,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968.

on him.” By these actions, Finch not only further emphasized that Smith’s testimony was true, but he encouraged the jurors to model their behavior after Smith and summon the courage to place justice over racial concerns.⁴⁵

Convinced of Sessum’s guilt, Wells was surprised that only half the jurors voted for conviction on the first vote. After discussing the case, a juror who worked with Wells at the Hercules plant changed his vote to guilty. Another juror, Charles Kroen, rose and stated, “This man was killed because he wanted people to be able to vote. They burned his house. Just because I’m Catholic, someone could decide tomorrow to do the same thing and burn my house. Just because you’re Baptist, someone could decide tomorrow to do the same thing to you.” One of the jurors stated, “Oh, they wouldn’t do that,” but another juror cautioned, “Remember Hitler.” The comment moved many of the jurors, for several among them had fought in World War II. Finally, Wells led a prayer in which he asked the “Lord just to lay on our hearts what he wanted us to do. . . . We believe that we want to know what’s right and we want to know what you want us to do.” Just before 7:00 p.m. the jury returned to the courtroom, and the clerk announced the guilty verdict. Spectators’ “jaws fell open,” but Sessum sat passively and chomped on his gum, even as Judge Hall sentenced him to life in prison. Dukes and Finch commended the jurors for their courage. The jurors worried about their decision. They feared reprisals, and most of them perceived the verdict as a victory for the black rights they opposed. Wells concluded, “We were fighting . . . a common enemy. . . the voter registrations and the civil rights people.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ray William Wells, interview, 68-69.

Bowers' bold prediction notwithstanding, an all-white Mississippi jury had dared to convict a white man for killing a black man. The guilty verdict proved a significant benchmark. Sessum was the first white person ever convicted for murdering a civil rights activist on the state level, and as journalist Terry Keeter stated, the case proved to be a "history making trial." The verdict shook the foundations of the Jim Crow judicial system and weakened white supremacist power. The society around the Klan seemed vastly changed; Klansmen could no longer rely on the racism of their communities to allow them to continue in their lawlessness because segregationists like Wells decided to place justice above white supremacy. The Sessum jury set an example and paved the way for other juries to deliver just verdicts. Sessum's conviction also convinced Finch and Dukes that they could use the judicial system to destroy the Klan as they had once exploited it to suppress black activism. Even the state's star witness received harsh punishment. Judge Stanton Hall sentenced Pitts to life at Parchman for his guilty plea in the murder and gave him two 10-year sentences for his guilty plea in the arson portion of the case. Pitts also received a five-year federal sentence for violating Dahmer's civil rights.⁴⁷

Still, the aftershocks of the verdict failed to bring down the entire system of racial

⁴⁶ First, second, third quotes, newspaper clipping, *The Clarion-Ledger*, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers; fourth and sixth quotes, Ray William Wells, interview, 70-72, *Ibid.*, 68; fifth quote, Elliott Chaze, "Sessum is Convicted," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1968.

⁴⁷ Quoting Terry Keeter, "Sessum Will Probably 'Wait It Out' In Parchman," *The Meridian Star*, March 17, 1968, Sessum FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-35, Helfrich Papers. According to the Southern Regional Council, prior to the Dahmer case, the only white person in the South convicted for murdering a black person during the entire Civil Rights era occurred in Alabama in 1956, see Nelson, "Tough Prosecution Led to Convictions," *Hattiesburg American*, March 19, 1995. SAC, Jackson to Director, May 6, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-251; "Pitts Gets Another Five Year Sentence," *The Clarion-Ledger*, July 16, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-263, both in Helfrich Papers.

absolutism, as Forrest County divided over the verdict. After the trial, juror Jimmy Walters received several threatening phone calls late at night; someone threw bottles at his home and “poured acid on the car and it sitting right under the carport. He done that while we were asleep.” An anonymous caller repeatedly telephoned another juror to call him a “nigger lover.” Nevertheless, other whites supported the conviction. Many community members lauded the jurors for their courage. Wells received praise from his friends, boss, and colleagues who commended him for doing “the right thing.” Wells believed that the verdict helped break the Klan, but it failed to revolutionize Mississippi. As Wells stated, it “still was hard to convict a white man against a black in the courts.”⁴⁸ Civil rights activists understood that the war might be reaching a turning point, but a decisive battle ensuring the Movement’s unconditional victory still eluded them.

The day after Sessum’s conviction, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in Jones County at the invitation of Reverend Allen Johnson, the minister whose house Bowers’ secret terror cell had bombed the previous November. Reverend Johnson hosted King in his newly renovated home and delivered him to speak to hundreds gathered at his St. Paul Church. Johnny Magee and other black teenagers had no interest in hearing Dr. King speak. Magee walked his mother to St. Paul and then left because he decided he “wasn’t listening to that handkerchief headed preacher” whom he believed called on blacks to “roll over or turn the other cheek.” He later regretted not attending, but at the time he had grown tired and frustrated with the slow progress of nonviolent resistance. During the service, Dr. King called on the overflowing crowd to fight racism and poverty that accompanied hatred and exploitation. They must change America where the privileged

⁴⁸ First quote, Janet Braswell, “1968 Dahmer Case Juror,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 31, 1998; all other quotes, Ray William Wells, interview, 72-73.

resided in houses of “wall to wall carpet,” and the exploited in homes of “wall-to-wall rats and roaches.” He promised that “we’re going to Washington to demand—not to beg—that something be done immediately to improve the lives of our poor people.” After his sermon, his motorcade transported him to Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, where more than 700 blacks had been waiting for over five hours. African Americans, including young activist Glenda Funchess and her friends, stood among the massive crowd that packed into the church and flowed into the streets to listen to the famous minister speak. Blacks were inspired that King had dared to come to the heart of Klan country, but they feared for him. Armed black men, including members of the Spirit, protected Dr. King during his speeches and guarded Father Quinn’s Holy Rosary Church where King spent the night.⁴⁹

Several weeks after Dr. King visited the Central Piney Woods, on April 4, 1968, James Earl Ray assassinated the famous minister in Memphis, Tennessee. America erupted in violence. Riots exploded across the nation leading to the death of 40 African Americans and 20,000 arrests. As shocked and angry Mississippi blacks mourned the death of Dr. King, many whites, even children, celebrated. At Thames Junior High School, Anthony Harris stared down at his desk and fought to control his rage as he heard his all-white classmates applaud the assassination. One student shouted: “The King is dead. Yeah!” Another chided, “Hey Wick. Nice Aim. Good shot. How did you get from

⁴⁹ First and second quote, Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009, MOHP recording; third, fourth, and fifth quotes, “Martin Luther King Plugs Washington Trek in Laurel,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 20, 1968. Glenda Funchess, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 23, 2008, MOHP recording; Marsh, *The Last Day*, 139. Clementine Benton, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 23, 2008; Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 24, 2009, both MOHP recordings.

Memphis so quickly?” Even elementary school children found King’s death reason for celebration. In Laurel, at Mason Elementary School, Charles Marsh heard his friends and acquaintances declare that the “nigger asked for it.” One boy chimed in that his daddy thought “it’s a good thing he’s dead.” Another white boy, worried that race riots may erupt in Laurel, carried a knife to school so that “those niggers won’t mess with me.”⁵⁰

Amidst the riots, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which fulfilled many of the Movement goals that Dr. King had devoted his life to achieve. The law prevented racial discrimination in housing and prescribed penalties for persons using violence and intimidation to prevent others from exercising their federal rights. In the Central Piney Woods, many whites perceived black riots rather than Klan violence as the gravest threat to America. In a public speech on May 6, USM President William D. McCain warned that unless America suppressed the black struggle the nation would fall into the hands of barbarians and join the Roman Empire in the graveyard of wasted magnificence. McCain’s vision included a white counter reaction: “If the people of the United States should ever descend into total racial warfare, there is not the slightest doubt about which side would win. If the police and National Guard ever really lose control, informal white armies will arise. . . . The senseless burning, looting, and killing could cause most Americans to forget everything but the color of skins.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ First and second quotes, Anthony Harris, “A Personal Account of Efforts to End School Segregation in a Southern School System,” *Connexions*, November 17, 2006, website: <http://cnx.org/content/m14113/latest/> (accessed June 2010); rest of quotes Marsh, *The Last Days*: 140. Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 288.

⁵¹ Quoting William D. McCain, May 6, 1968, speech, 16-17, 20, William D. McCain Papers, McCain, USM. Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-284, 82 Stat. 73), United States Congress, in *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November

Bowers considered his White Knights as the only vigilante group with the power to prevent “Negroes, Jews, and Communists” from usurping power in Mississippi. He grew despondent over the jury’s verdict in the Sessum case and remained convinced that the FBI, along with Judge Hall had “rigged” the jury. The killing of Dr. King, however, lifted his spirits, and he and several Klansmen gathered at John’s Café for several nights after the murder to celebrate his death. Some Klan informants speculated that Bowers might have ordered the killing as he insinuated to them that he was responsible. Another informant, however, claimed that he had heard Bowers state that the assassination occurred at an inopportune time and theorized that the “Feds” may have committed the murder to place pressure on the Klan. As the spring and summer progressed and the Dahmer trials continued, Bowers became increasingly enraged by the FBI’s presence. He called Hoover “a false god,” the “antichrist,” “the number one enemy of the white race” and his agents “unchristian agents of Communism.” Bowers even ranted about killing Roy Moore and his agents, but he never issued such an order.⁵²

Klan bravado aside, the conviction of Sessum frightened many White Knights, and the mistrial in the DeBoxtel case in late March failed to soothe them. They wanted exonerations. The Klansmen quickly learned that that they could no longer count on the racism of white jurors to achieve acquittals. So, they sought alternative means of

1984, 81-94, John C. Stennis Collection, Series 43, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Stennis Collection and Mitchell, MSU]; Paul Grady to Sadie C. Barron, May 30, 1968, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM; John Bell Williams, speech, April 5, 1968, Record Group 27, Governors’ Papers, MDAH, [hereinafter cited as RG 27, MDAH]; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 140-141.

⁵² Supplemental Non-Prosecutive Summary Report, August 9, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 8, #157-18-1152, 18-52, Helfrich Papers.

influencing jurors. The Klan tried to tamper with the juries in at least three Dahmer cases, and Bowers sent his secret cell on a bombing mission during the spring and summer, in part to frighten future jurors into acquitting Klansmen. Some of Bowers' efforts backfired. On May 22, authorities charged Pat Massengale, a reputed Klansman, with obstruction of justice after Finch learned that he had tampered with the jury to hear the case against William Thomas Smith. Judge Hall dismissed the jury and postponed the Smith trial while Finch prosecuted Massengale.⁵³

Witness for the prosecution Harvel Smith testified that his friend, Massengale, had approached him and told him that one of his employees, Jerry Wayne Shirley, was in the jury pool. Massengale needed to know how Shirley would vote. He impressed upon Smith that the Klan "needed a 'no' vote in the case because a conviction would break the back of the Klan," and "if they break the grip of the Klan they will break the back of Mississippi." Massengale implored Smith to find out Shirley's opinion on the case. Smith revealed that he had initially agreed to comply with Massengale's request; but then he grew worried and angry with Massengale because he realized that "it's damn little friend to put me in a position where I'm doing wrong." He contacted Finch and informed him of Massengale's crime. On August 22, the jury reported that it was deadlocked 9 to 3 for acquittal and Judge Hall declared a mistrial. The state never again tried Massengale.⁵⁴

Accusations of jury tampering would also emerge in the Bowers case. The

⁵³ "Mistrial Declared in DeBoxtel Murder Case," *Hattiesburg American*, March 22, 1968; Whitehead, *Attack on Terror*, 285-302; Elliott Chaze, "State Asks," *Hattiesburg American*, May 21, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Jury-tampering Charge," *Hattiesburg American*, May 22, 1968.

⁵⁴ First quote "Mistrial is Declared," *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 1968; all other quotes, "Jury Tampering Brings Delay in Charge," *Hattiesburg American*, May 22, 1968. "Hearing and Arraignment," *Hattiesburg American*, May 23, 1968.

prosecution viewed Bowers as the most significant defendant not only because he served as the head of the White Knights, but because he was such an effective and powerful leader. When the trial commenced in mid-May, the state presented a powerful case once again with testimony by Ellie Dahmer, FBI agents, doctors, and eyewitness accounts from Rogers, Pitts, and J. B. Smith. Rogers and Pitts stressed that Bowers had ordered and orchestrated Dahmer's murder; and Pitts recalled that the morning after the raid, Bowers "told me there wasn't no way they could convict us if we kept our mouths shut—he said the penalty for anyone giving information to the law was death." Bowers' attorney, Lawrence Arrington, had two main strategies: he sought to discredit Pitts' by impugning his character and to vindicate Bowers by upholding him as an upstanding citizen. On cross-examination, the defense portrayed Pitts as an unfaithful husband living a lascivious and luxurious lifestyle on the government's bill. Arrington revealed that since the trials began, Pitts had been staying at a motel under the guard of U. S. marshals, rather than in prison, and he presented to the court photographs of Pitts swimming in a motel pool with his pretty blond mistress, Laura Welborn, and dining at expensive restaurants. Arrington had successfully forced the jurors to question Pitts' credibility, but he failed to portray Bowers as a respectable citizen. He damaged his own case when he called to the stand the former prosecutor of Jones County, Charles Pickering, as a character witness for Bowers, because to his surprise, Pickering described Bowers as a violent and dangerous man.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Quoting "Bowers Trial Nearing Jury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 16, 1968; "Seating Jury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 21, 1968; "Places Bowers in Dahmer Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 15, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Says Bowers Ordered Fire Raid," *Hattiesburg American*, May 15, 1968; "Jury Still Out," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 17, 1968; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 185.

In closing arguments, Finch stated that Bowers had established himself as judge and jury in the trial of Dahmer and that the Imperial Wizard must be punished for his lawlessness. Finch informed the jurors “they can bring all the wizards and lizards and thugs from Jones County down here,” and the state would continue to prosecute them. Finch admitted that Pitts was not a man of good character, but he noted that the Klan had found him good enough not only to be accepted as a Klansmen but to participate in the Dahmer attack. He also pointed out that Pitts had pled guilty to charges of arson and murder and faced a life sentence. During the defense summation, Arrington reiterated his argument that Pitts was living extravagantly off the government—lounging in the sun and dining on steaks at the Alamo Plaza Courts Motel. He claimed that the state was setting a dangerous precedent by allowing a bought witness to testify.⁵⁶

When the 12 white men gathered in the jury room to determine the verdict, juror Douglas Herring rose and provided a powerful argument to convict the Imperial Wizard. The other 11 men nodded their heads. In an oral vote, all 12 men declared their intent to find Bowers’ “guilty.” Yet after collecting all of the written ballots, the foreman announced that someone had voted not guilty. The puzzled men voted several more times. Each oral vote resulted in a unanimous “guilty” verdict, and each secret ballot resulted in one “not guilty” vote. Several of the jurors suspected Donald Butler as the holdout and began to question him. He admitted that he had voted “not guilty,” but he refused to explain why. After deliberating for 22 hours, the jurors reported to the judge that they were deadlocked 11 to 1 for conviction. At 3:50 p.m. on Friday, Judge Hall declared a mistrial. Bowers was released on bond. The 11 jurors who voted guilty were

⁵⁶ “Jury Still Out,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 17, 1968.

outraged. One of them, Wayne Walters, noted that “we felt he was guilty, and he was getting away.”⁵⁷

The Klansmen’s new strategy of jury tampering worked again, though the result was closer than they thought. Throughout the trial, the Klan had tried to intimidate jurors. One juror recalled how Deavours Nix stood outside the courthouse every time the jurors exited “with his arms crossed trying to intimidate us.” Although Butler always denied that the Klan influenced his vote, a Klan informant learned from Bowers that the White Knights had contacted three of the jurors, including Donald Butler. Apparently, they convinced only Butler to vote not guilty, but, of course, they needed just one man. The Klan punished some of the jurors who voted against Bowers. After the trial, Louise Herring, a wife of one of the jurors, noticed strange vehicles pulling into the driveway and she received crank calls at all hours of the night. Someone flattened all four tires on her son’s vehicle.⁵⁸

Despite all the threats, jury tampering, and the Klan’s summer terror campaign, the White Knights failed to deter the steady advance of the state and federal governments against the Invisible Empire. Although disappointed by the Bowers’ mistrial, Finch refused to accept defeat. He declared that “the state of Mississippi will continue to try these cases until a verdict is reached—one way or the other and we’ll try them just as hard and just as long as the state of Mississippi knows how.” Hattiesburg, Finch concluded, “will not be dominated by any belligerent or unlawful or any of that kind of

⁵⁷ Quoting Jerry Mitchell, “Lone ‘Not Guilty’ Vote Defies Oral Verdict of Jurors,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 18, 1994; “Lone Juror,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 18, 1968.

⁵⁸ Quoting Mario Rossilli, “A Crime Not Forgotten,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 22, 1998, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers.

character regardless of their race, creed, or color.” Undaunted by Finch’s speech, the Klan resumed its bombing campaign. On May 28, the Klan’s secret cell bombed the Temple Beth Israel Synagogue in Meridian. Equally undaunted, the FBI remained determined to destroy the Klan. For the previous 10 months, agents had worked with the Anti-Defamation League and Jewish communities in Meridian and Jackson to crack the Bowers’ secret terror cell. The League raised \$80,000 that the FBI paid to two Klan informants after they informed agents of the next target. On June 29, agents and local police caught Kathy Ainsworth and Albert Thomas Tarrants III trying to bomb the home of a Jewish man in Jackson. The subsequent shootout left Ainsworth dead and Tarrants and an officer wounded. The Klan attack was the last major publicized Klan assault in Mississippi.⁵⁹

There would be other Klan assaults, even murders, but the courts and the media gave them scant attention, did not tie them to the Klan, and rarely would they even considered them racial murders. In many black households, however, stories of racial killings abounded. In Laurel’s KC Bottom, blacks believed that Klansmen were responsible for the many black corpses found on railroad tracks over the years. They claimed that a white service attendant at the gas station next to the Burger-Chef had killed a black man, Albert Atkins, Jr. They also knew about the many racial crimes of Klansman Maurice Flowers, who owned a grocery store and several other businesses on

⁵⁹ Quoting “Lone Juror,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 18, 1968. FBI Report: Bombing Investigations in Mississippi, June 18, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 7, #158-18-1099, Helfrich Papers; Nelson, *Terror in the Night*; Elliott Chaze, “State Asks,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 21, 1968; Sam Bowers to Tom E. Tucker, July 1, 1968, Sam Bowers Folder, Subject Files, *State v. Charles Noble Binder*, Helfrich Papers; Jack Nelson, “Police Arrange Trap: Klan Terror Is Target,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1970; FBI Report, November 20, 1968, Bowers FBI File, vol. 8, #157-18-1217, Helfrich Papers.

the black side of town. During the Movement years, Flowers had shot and killed several black men. The white establishment never punished these men for their crimes. These murders occurred off the radar of the FBI as they did not involve civil rights activists or prominent citizens, and local law enforcement ignored them. The lack of national attention to these less sensational murders reflected that larger white America still failed to equate black and white life. In general murders of whites, no matter the circumstances, elicited significant media and law enforcement attention. Still, in the wake of Tarrants' arrest and the Dahmer convictions, the Klan was dying.⁶⁰

While the Klan began to decline in the summer of 1968, blacks steadily gained political power. By mid-1968, black registration had greatly increased in Mississippi with 59.4 percent of the eligible black voters registered. Whites still had a much higher registration rate at 92.4 percent. Black voter registration in Forrest County reached 67.4 percent, but the white percentage was 94.3 percent. Jones County had a lower rate of both black and white registration, but the disparity between the races greatly narrowed with 45.1 percent of blacks compared to 48.9 percent of whites registered. Although in both counties the white population was the majority, the massive black registration reflected significant changes in the Central Piney Woods. Moreover, blacks enjoyed the majority population in many other counties, and they too were voting. Finally, as more and more blacks registered, they increased their numbers in jury pools which could have a powerful impact on the justice system. At the National Democratic Convention in the summer of 1968, the MFDP achieved a major victory when the credentials committee accepted the

⁶⁰ Johnny Magee, interview; Larry McGill, interview. For Maurice Flowers' membership in the Klan, see, Stephen A. Callender to SAC, New Orleans, re: White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, March 24, 1964, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-5, Helfrich Papers.

MFDP delegation over the Regular Democrats. The tenacity of the MFDP finally turned the federal political tide away from white supremacists. Activists hoped the Klan trials in the Dahmer case would continue to turn the judicial tide toward racial justice.⁶¹

In mid-July 1968, when William Thomas Smith faced murder charges before a biracial jury, his lawyer, Carl Berry, utilized two unique strategies. First, he tried to prove that the case was one of mistaken identity. In 1966, the federal government had mistakenly charged a man by the name of William Ray Smith, also a Klansmen, in the Dahmer attack. Pitts, however, claimed that William Thomas Smith, not William Ray Smith, had participated in the Dahmer project. Second, Smith was the only defendant to take the stand in front of a jury in the Dahmer state trials. Smith, a slightly balding, 32-year-old bachelor offered no alibi for the night of the attack, but he insisted he had not participated in the murder. He admitted that he had joined the Klan in November 1964, but he claimed that he had stopped associating with the White Knights several months prior to the attack on the Dahmer home. Smith also admitted that Charles Clifford Wilson, his employer and another defendant in the Dahmer case, had persuaded him to join the White Knights and had taken him to the initiation ceremony at Byrd's farm. Smith became annoyed after the prosecution repeatedly asked him about the symbolic significance of the gun and the Bible in the Klan's initiation ceremony. Finally, Smith shouted that the Klansmen used the Bible to administer the oath, and he thought the gun perhaps symbolized "secrecy and security." Smith also inadvertently corroborated Rogers' testimony by revealing that the Klan classified its violent missions under four

⁶¹ John Bell Williams, statement, August 21, 1968, RG 27, MDAH; Voter Registration in the South, Spring-Summer 1968, Voter Education Project, Southern Regional Council Inc, A. E. Cox Collection, Mitchell, MSU.

project numbers.⁶²

In closing arguments, Finch pointed out that the defense had failed to ask Smith where he was on the night of the attack, and he emphatically declared that if he were a defendant on trial, he would eagerly reveal his alibi “if I had one to offer.” Finch implored the jury, “don’t leave us standing alone. The federal government has no jurisdiction in murder and arson. Their case is a conspiracy matter. Please set the pattern for us now in this case, don’t leave us to stand by ourselves.” In the defense summation, Berry concentrated on discrediting Pitts by calling him a confessed arsonist, murderer, and perjurer. Berry pointed to Smith and opined that “if this man was guilty do you think he would have taken that witness stand and looked you in the eye and given testimony? . . . Don’t find this man guilty just because you are a member of the NAACP and the defendant is a member of the Ku Klux Klan.” On a July morning in 1968, the jury of nine whites and three blacks found Smith guilty. Judge Hall sentenced Smith to life in prison.⁶³

The following week, Finch and Dukes hoped to convict the most prestigious suspect—Charles Clifford Wilson. The wealthy entrepreneur had hired several lawyers, Leonard Melvin, Sr., and Jr., as well as Harold Melvin and Sarah Entekin, to defend him. They established an interesting, if not bizarre, argument when they sought to

⁶² “Special Venire,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 9, 1968; “Begin Picking Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1968; Elliot Chaze, “Smith Defense,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 18, 1968; Elliott Chaze, “Jury finds Bill Smith Guilty,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1968; “Guilty Verdict Against Smith,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 19, 1968.

⁶³ Quoting Elliott Chaze, “Jury Finds Bill Smith Guilty,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1968. “Guilty Verdict Against Smith,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 19, 1968; “Special Venire,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 9, 1968; “Begin Picking Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 16, 1968.

discredit Pitts by claiming that the star witness suffered from a disease known as acromegaly that rendered him a mentally incompetent witness. Defense expert witness Dr. Edwin Cole explained that acromegaly causes people to over-react to stimulation. Sufferers from acromegaly like Pitts became extremely manic or depressed. Cole also revealed that people suffering from the disease generally had “a massively enlarged jaw which had increased progressively in size and interfered with alignment of the teeth.” Reporter Elliott Chaze pointed out that this ailment decreased one’s sexual activity. As the defense eagerly emphasized Pitts’ adultery at every trial, Pitts clearly did not suffer from a low sex drive.⁶⁴

The defense mainly sought to exonerate Wilson on alibi and character witness testimony. Wilson’s wife testified that her husband was sleeping next to her in their bed on the night of the attack. The defense also paraded 18 character witnesses to the stand, all of them from middling or wealthy backgrounds. One witness, George Scholegel, president of the Mississippi Junior Chamber of Commerce, testified that his opinion of Wilson would not change, even if he discovered Wilson was a Klansmen. He stated, “I don’t think he’d be a violent person. I don’t think you can say a man is violent just because he belongs to a certain organization. I know this man. I’ve seen him work with retarded children.”⁶⁵

During closing arguments, the defense focused on discrediting Pitts. Melvin

⁶⁴ Quoting “Selection of Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 23, 1968. “Doctor Brings New Angle,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 26, 1968; Elliott Chaze, “Wilson Murder Trial Ends,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 29, 1968.

⁶⁵ Quoting “Doctor Brings New Angle,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 27, 1968. Elliott Chaze, “Wilson Murder Trial Ends in Hung Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 29, 1968.

argued that “Pitts says he had a change of heart and that’s why he decided to confess and turn state’s evidence. I say that the only time he will have a change of heart is when they quit paying him that \$100 a week.” James Finch countered that Pitts had received a life sentence. Then, he noted, “they’ve made much of the fact Pitts has been paid \$3,300 by the government. How much of your liberty would you sell for \$3,300 or for \$33,000? Would you sell any part of it?” Finch failed to convince enough jury members that the wealthy, elegant man from Laurel had committed murder. The jury deadlocked over the verdict—three for acquittal, nine for conviction. Judge Hall declared a mistrial, but he refused to release Wilson on bond.⁶⁶

The mistrial failed to soothe the White Knights because in a series of Klan trials that fall and winter, juries refused to acquit a single Klansmen. In November, after jurors deliberated for just 12 minutes, they found Lawrence Byrd guilty of arson. Judge Hall sentenced Byrd to 10 years. A few days later, the jury in Franklin Lyons’ case deadlocked six to six. On November 27, 1968, a state court sentenced Thomas Tarrants to 30 years in prison for his part in one of the Klan bombings. In February 1969, Finch and Dukes prosecuted Wilson a second time, and after six hours of deliberation, the jury found Wilson guilty, and Judge Hall sentenced him to life in prison. The Klan trials devastated the White Knights. Throughout 1968 and 1969, Klansmen began a mass exodus from the Invisible Empire. In February an informant reported that many Klansmen had ceased attending meetings, paying dues, and joining in Klan activities because of the dire legal consequences of membership. In early 1969, it seemed that even

⁶⁶ Elliott Chaze, “Wilson Murder Trial Ends in Hung Jury,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 29, 1968.

the Imperial Wizard might finally face prison.⁶⁷

Throughout Bowers' second trial, the Imperial Wizard appeared unconcerned, even though the jury pool included African Americans. A half smile filled his face, as though he knew the jury would never convict him. Every day during the trial, Bowers, who had long believed that violence against the non-Aryan, non-Protestant world was his Christian crusade, wore a lapel pin featuring the Christian emblem of a fish. A moment of humor relieved the tension in the courtroom during Pitts' testimony. Under cross-examination, Pitts revealed that Nix's office had served as the center of Klan business and that most people who entered the space were Klansmen. Arrington said, "Well, I've been in that office and I'm no Klansman." Pitts responded in an insipid voice, "I don't know that." The courtroom erupted in laughter until Judge Hall threatened to dismiss the spectators. At 3:45 p.m. on January 24, the jury began deliberating. When two jurors decided he was innocent but refused to review the evidence or discuss the case, the other 10 spent hours trying to convince them that the evidence proved Bowers' guilt. At 8:30 p.m., Judge Hall retired for the night and ordered the bailiff to contact him should the jury reach a verdict.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ "Jury Out 12 Minutes," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 11, 1968; "Jury Deadlocks Enter Mistrial In Lyons' Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 15, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Defendant to Get Life," *Hattiesburg American*, February 1, 1969; "Rogers Relates Bowers' Orders," *The Time Picayune*, January 23, 1969. Bernard C. Lang to SAC, Jackson, November 26, 1968, Moss FBI File, vol. 1, #157-3565-167; FBI Report, February 10, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4433, both in Helfrich Papers. *Thomas Albert Tarrants, III v. State of Mississippi*, June 1, 1970, No. 45684, 236 So. 2d 360; 1970 Miss. LEXIS 1475.

⁶⁸ Quoting "White Takes 5th," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 24, 1969; "Rogers Relates Bowers' Orders," *The Time Picayune*, January 23, 1969; "Wilson Faces Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, January 27, 1969; "Mistrial in Bowers' Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 25, 1969.

Nearly eight hours later, at 4:15 am, a freight train derailed in Laurel and 16 of the 26 box cars transporting 23,000 gallons of petroleum exploded. Busted cars catapulted into neighborhoods and created a firestorm that demolished two blocks in the black community of Kingston. A mile from the crash on Joe Wheeler Street, civil rights activist Maycie Gore and her husband Alvin awoke to the deafening explosion that picked their bed off the floor. They ran out of their backdoor where they saw the sky glowing red. They gathered their children and rushed outside into the freezing night where their panicked neighbors had flooded the streets. Moments later, the deafening sound of explosions erupted again as another petroleum box car flipped off the rail, flew into homes and businesses, and exploded into flames. The Gores and their neighbors panicked. Those without cars ran from the sounds and the sudden heat that penetrated the cold air.

The Gores piled into their vehicle and fled out into the country to the Powers Community where Maycie's parents, Bennie and Mittie Keahey, lived. When the Gores arrived at the Keahey's home, another explosion rocked the earth, and the fires turned the sky crimson. Terrified, they fled Jones County—hundreds of vehicles were already on the highways as blacks tried to flee the fire. No one knew the cause yet, but many speculated that it was a Klan hit—that Klansmen had caused the train to derail by tampering with the tracks. The Klan had bombed rail lines during the Masonite strike, so tampering with the rails was not beyond their skills or protocol. By daybreak, news spread that it was an accident, and a later investigation confirmed the theory. Some blacks, however, remained convinced that the derailment was a Klan terror attack. The fires killed two blacks, injured 39 more, demolished 46 homes and businesses, and damaged another 85

properties over a 10 block radius, most of them black-owned.⁶⁹

Five hours after the train derailment, Judge Hall called the jury in Bowers' case into his courtroom. The foreman announced that the jurors were deadlocked 10 to 2 for conviction. When the jurors insisted that they would never reach a verdict no matter how long they deliberated, the judge declared a mistrial. A month after the trial, an informant revealed that the Klan had coerced three jurors to vote for acquittal, but one of them "turned yellow" and voted to convict Bowers.⁷⁰ The response of jurors to the Klan efforts to tamper with the juries reflected the changes transpiring among the white citizenry and in the Mississippi justice system. In the William Smith jury tampering case, Harvel Smith's response to the intimidation—his initial agreement to comply with the Klan's wishes; his anxiousness over the decision; and his ultimate exposure of the tampering—is in many ways symbolic of Mississippi's grueling struggle toward racial justice. Like Harvel Smith, many citizens found themselves trapped in the battle between the Klan and the law. During the Dahmer trials, law enforcement, the judge, and the prosecutors proved that they would no longer tolerate white supremacist lawlessness. Consequently, even many of those white citizens who might have sympathized with Klansmen refused to put their own liberty at risk to help them, which may explain why one of the jurors who had agreed to vote not guilty changed his mind.

Other white citizens who had long hated Klan violence increasingly reached

⁶⁹ Maycie Gore, interview; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 226-228. Ann Sanders, "Tank Car Blasts," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 25, 1969; Ann Sanders, "Ask Disaster Area Status," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 27, 1969; Anthony Wheat, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010, MOHP recording.

⁷⁰ Quoting FBI Report, February 10, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4433, Helfrich Papers; "Mistrial in Bowers' Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 25, 1969.

across the racial divide, particularly after the tragic train derailment in Laurel awakened their conscience. When Reverend Robert Marsh first learned of the fire, he worried that it was a Klan hit as Bowers had warned that he would seek vengeance for the Klan trials. Immediately, he and other white pastors joined forces with black leaders to aid African Americans left homeless by the fires. They helped them find shelter and provisions; and they joined efforts to clear the vestiges of their belongings from their burned-out homes. In the Masonite Room where Reverend Marsh had presented Klansmen Charles Wilson with the Jacyee Award, Marsh and other pastors held interracial meetings to discuss how to rebuild black neighborhoods. Several white men offered their construction companies to rebuild homes and businesses. On Thursday nights, the pastors began holding prayer meetings attended by blacks and whites. Marsh's son Charles marveled at the interracial bonding as white and black youths joined hands and sang: "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. We pray that unity may be restored. They will know we are Christians by our love." Over the next several months, the interracial prayer meetings and cooperation continued. Still, as the younger Marsh recalled, in the still divided and angry landscape of Laurel, racial harmony could not last.⁷¹

One Sunday morning, a black girl attended Reverend Marsh's First Baptist Church in Laurel. The appearance of the African American shocked many of the white congregants, several of whom demanded that Marsh make her leave. Among the enraged whites were many who had offered their services to rebuild black neighborhoods after the fire. Reverend Marsh could not turn back now that he had finally summoned the courage to reach across the racial divide. He insisted that the black girl could attend the service.

⁷¹ Quoting Marsh, *The Last Days*, 229; *Ibid.*, 226-230.

One parishioner informed Marsh that he would not “sit down with niggers” and left the church. Many other parishioners demanded that he never allow a black person to attend the church again. Over the next several months, a black person occasionally attended Marsh’s church, and the interracial meetings for rebuilding black neighborhoods continued for awhile. Eventually, however, the meetings and the move toward church integration dissipated as the adults and teenagers of both races returned to their segregated worlds. Charles Marsh later recalled that “no white people asked black Laurerites forgiveness for the sins of racism, drafted a confession of guilt and reconciliation, [or] discussed the topic in one of our think-ins.”⁷² The Klan trials trapped the Central Piney Woods in a racial purgatory as some whites turned against the evils of the Klan and retreated from the white supremacist battle lines, but others dug into the trenches, sure that their side was right and victory still not unfathomable. Racial relations remained tense in the Central Piney Woods as the federal trial of the Klansmen in the Dahmer killing approached.

FBI agents had grown increasingly concerned about their star witness, Billy Roy Pitts, as he edged toward a nervous breakdown. Pitts spent most of 1968 and 1969 isolated in motel rooms in Texas and New Orleans under the constant guard of U. S. marshals. Agents permitted him weekly one-hour visits with his wife, his two young sons, and his father, but, they reduced his contact with his mistress, Laura Welborn, to short phone calls. Marshals supervised all visitation sessions and refused Pitts’ request for private conjugal visits with his wife. Pitts lacked access to a television, and he had little interest in the few books authorities provided him. Hours seemed to stretch on

⁷² Quoting Marsh, *The Last Days*, 231, 235; *Ibid.*, 230-235.

endlessly. Pitts' interactions with the marshals depressed him, for many of them treated him with great disdain, and one marshal derided him as a "\$75 a week pimp for the FBI." In their presence, his ninth-grade education made him feel inferior. His few telephone calls left him anxious, as they were consumed by his wife's complaints about their poverty and his mistress' despair over their separation. With little activity to divert his attention from his circumstances, Pitts vacillated between bouts of boredom, relentless depression, and anxious dread for his future.⁷³

A month before Bowers' second trial, on December 29, 1968, marshals guarding Pitts heard a shot and rushed into Pitts' room where they found him laying face down on the floor in a pool of blood. Pitts had tried but failed to shoot himself in the heart. The bullet penetrated his chest and left a four-inch wound, but he lived. He had written a note before he shot himself to declare that he had told the truth in court and that he hoped God would forgive him. While Pitts recovered, he sent Agent Benjamin Graves a letter begging him to send money to his family and to allow him to see Laura Welborn. He apologized for trying to commit suicide, but he declared that he could not "live without Laura. If I can't see her, I have no reason to live." Pitts also wrote numerous letters to agents and to his mistress and father to complain about his living conditions. He filled his letters with ruminations about the prospect of spending his life in prison despite the tremendous aid he had delivered to the state and federal authorities. Pitts also desperately sought the approval of federal agents. He admitted that he lacked an education and had difficulty expressing himself, but it hurt him when some federal agents called him a

⁷³ Quoting Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Graves or Mr. Lee, December 28, 1969. Summary in FBI Report for File, December 30, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 51, #44-1512-4388, 51; SAC, Jackson to Director, March 10, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4444, all in, Helfrich Papers.

“sorry” person.⁷⁴

Agents also received numerous letters and phone calls from Pitts’ family and mistress. Pitts’ wife, Bonnie, begged agents to move Billy Roy closer to her new residence in Louisiana so he could see their sons more often while Welborn constantly complained about her limited contacts with her lover. W. C. Pitts, Pitts’ father, agonized over his son’s mental health. Finally in March, Pitts’ mental health improved when agents arranged for Pitts to see Welborn, and his father purchased a television for him.⁷⁵ Pitts’ testimony had brought down some top officers in the Klan, and agents and state authorities still held out hope that he could hand them the wizard. The FBI struggled to keep Pitts sane and alive and his family and his mistress calm as the federal trials neared.

The last major federal stand against the Invisible Empire commenced in April, 1969 when the Department of Justice initiated the trials in the DABURN case. The Department of Justice had indicted 16 men: Sam Bowers, Cecil Sessum, Henry DeBoxtel, Lawrence Byrd, Travis Giles, Franklin Lyons, Deavours Nix, Charles Noble, William Thomas Smith, Lester Thornton, Charles Clifford Wilson, Charles Lamar Lowe, Clifford Eudell Lowe, Melvin Sennet “Pete” Martin, Mordaunt Hamilton, and Benjamin

⁷⁴ First quote, Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Graves, in Benjamin F. Graves to SAC, Jackson, January 9, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 51, #44-1512-4399; last quote, FBI Report, December 30, 1968, DABURN FBI File, vol. 51, #44-1512-4388, 51, Helfrich Papers. FBI Report, December 30, 1968, FBI FILE, vol. 51, #44-1512-4388; and Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Graves or Mr. Lee, December 28, 1969; Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Lee, February 28, 1968; Billy Roy Pitts to Roy K. Moore, March 3, 1969, all attached to SAC Jackson to Director, March 10, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4444, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁷⁵ SAC, Jackson to Director, February 25, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4438; SAC, Jackson to Director, March 19, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4453; SAC, Jackson to Director, March 14, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4449, all in Helfrich Papers.

“Billy” Moss. It eventually dropped charges against both of the Lowes, Martin, and Hamilton, and Judge Dan Russell granted Moss a continuance after his lawyer proved that he was too ill to stand trial. The Department of Justice tried the remaining 11 Klansmen on charges of violating the Voting Rights Act, which forbids anyone from preventing a person from voting through coercion and/or intimidation.⁷⁶

Several of the defendants requested a change of venue on the grounds that the media had prejudiced potential jurors against them, but the court rejected their motions. In mid-April, Judge Russell ordered the trial moved to Meridian because the federal court facilities in Hattiesburg could not support such a large trial, but he ordered the jurors selected from a Hattiesburg jury pool. A team of seven lawyers represented the defense: Merle Palmer, Percy Quinn, Guy Walker, Harold Melvin, Lawrence Arrington, Carl Berry, and former gubernatorial candidate William Waller. In late April, the defense and the prosecution chose a jury of seven white males and five white females with two white females as alternates. During the selection process, Bowers noted the names of all the jurors on his notepad.⁷⁷

Racial tension remained ubiquitous in Mississippi and the threat of violence palpable. Anonymous white men threatened Judge Russell over the telephone and

⁷⁶ “All White Jury Accepted, Testimony Slated in Conspiracy Trial,” *The Meridian Star*, April 29, 1969; “Jury Begins Hearing Dahmer Case Testimony,” newspaper clipping, n. d., Dahmer Collection; “Continuance Granted,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 15, 1969; FBI Summary of DABURN, federal trial, May 19, 1969, FBI File, #44-31694-889, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers].

⁷⁷ Elliott Chaze, “Dahmer Case Conspiracy Trial Moved to Meridian,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 14, 1969, Dahmer Collection; James Downey, “Jury Begins Hearing Dahmer Case Testimony,” n. d., Dahmer Collection; FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers.

lambasted the judge for hearing the case. In response, Judge Russell and federal officials implemented rigid security procedures. The judge sequestered the jury, and U. S. marshals shepherded the jurors, witnesses, and defendants to and from the courthouse. Linked in shackles, the 11 Klan defendants entered and exited the courtroom in chains. U. S. Attorney for the Southern District Robert Hauberg and Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division Robert Owen tried the case in a conspicuously quiet courtroom, as few spectators other than the friends and families of the defendants and "a handful of the curious" bothered to witness the last great federal stand against the Klan in Mississippi.⁷⁸

The quiet courthouse seemed eerie to Ellie Dahmer. Prior to the start of the first day's testimony, marshals placed her in a waiting room with the 11 Klansmen. She refused to capitulate to her fears. By this point, she had testified 18 times in state trials and before grand juries, and she held out hope that she could help bring the men before her to justice for killing her husband. After Agent James Awe had explained the crime scene area and the evidence, Dahmer testified. Once again, from the witness stand, she recalled the attack on her family's home. She managed to keep her emotions at bay until Owen asked what happened to her husband after the attack. Her voice "quaver[ed]" as she responded, "he died." Tears filled her eyes. She lowered her head a moment, regained her poise, and continued. To lay the groundwork for the Klan motive, prosecutors called former President of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP J. C. Fairley to the stand to

⁷⁸ Quoting Jerry Kerns, "Pitts 'Sings Again' In Dahmer Slaying," *The Meridian Star*, May 1, 1969, Dahmer Collection. James H. Downey, "Jury Begins Hearing Dahmer Case Testimony," April [?] 1969, Dahmer Collection; J. L. Martin to SAC, Jackson, May 16, 1969, FBI File, vol. 54, #44-1512-4554, Helfrich Papers.

testify that Vernon Dahmer was heavily involved in voter registration activities.⁷⁹

After establishing the motive and presenting the evidence from the crime scene, Owen and Hauberg relied on Klan informants and statements by the defendants to tie the 11 defendants to the killing. The combined testimony of Pitts and Rogers implicated all the Klan defendants in some or all phases of the murder, and prosecutors admitted into evidence several of the defendant's confessions and statements. FBI Agent Donald A. Schlaefter testified that Charles Noble had informed him that he had volunteered to participate in the Dahmer project and that he had also participated in a dry-run of the attack. Agent John Rucker testified that DeBoxtel had admitted that after Bowers handpicked him for the Dahmer job, he arranged for the vehicles used by the Klansmen. After a series of defense objections to Rucker's testimony, Judge Russell dismissed the jury from the courtroom. Rucker claimed that the agents informed DeBoxtel of his rights prior to all 16 interviews and that DeBoxtel had waived his right to counsel—assertions DeBoxtel denied. DeBoxtel alleged that on the day of his arrest, agents held him at gun point and coerced him to cooperate by threatening to destroy his mother's business. Judge Russell found DeBoxtel's claims unbelievable and admitted each of his statements into evidence.⁸⁰

Judge Russell dismissed the jury from the courtroom to hear conflicting stories

⁷⁹ Quoting "Dahmer Witness Testifies at Miss. Conspiracy Trial," n. d., Dahmer Collection; FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers; Ellie Dahmer, speech, Symposium on Civil Rights in Hattiesburg, Gonzalez Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi, June 5, 2001, tape-recording, McCain Library and Archives, USM.

⁸⁰ Jerry Kerns, "Dahmer's Widow Offers Testimony," *The Meridian Star*, April 29, 1969; James H. Downey, "Agent Testifies," *Hattiesburg American*, May 5, 1969; James H. Downey, "Witness Tells of Attack," *The Times Picayune*, May 4, 1969; FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers.

regarding Sessum's statements to FBI agents. As in the state trials, Agents J. L. Martin and William F. Dukes claimed that Sessum voluntarily confessed that he had participated in the Dahmer murder whereas Sessum claimed the agents had illegally detained him and Byrd and forced him to give a false confession by beating him. Judge Russell interrupted Sessum and asked, "Have you ever been in a mental institution?" Sessum replied, "No sir." At the completion of his narrative, Russell angrily stated, "I think you are on dangerous ground. That's the most fantastic tale I have heard in four years on the bench, and you a preacher. It's fortunate you're being judged by a jury and not by me." The judge admitted the confession into evidence. However, Judge Russell granted a mistrial for Byrd when his lawyer, Guy Walker, insisted that the hearsay statements by Dukes and Martin implicated Byrd. Judge Russell returned Byrd to state custody to serve his sentence for his state conviction.⁸¹

Throughout the trial, the defense lawyers employed a two-pronged strategy; they provided alibi and character witnesses for as many defendants as possible and tried to impeach the testimony of Pitts and Rogers. The wives of Wilson, DeBoxtel, Noble, and Thornton, and the mothers of Bowers, Sessum, and Smith all provided alibis for their accused husbands and sons respectively. Several witnesses took the stand to testify to the good character of the defendants, including Merrill Pickering, who had served as the sheriff of Jones County at the time of the Dahmer attack. Other witnesses testified to the poor character of Pitts and Rogers. Defense attorneys implied that Pitts had fabricated his testimony and sold it to the FBI. On redirect, Pitts insisted that the FBI began paying him in November 1967 for the sole purposes of relocating, protecting, and providing

⁸¹ James H. Downey, "Russell Calls Tale Fantastic," *Times-Picayune*, n. d., Dahmer Collection; FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers.

necessities for his family. Still, defense attorneys easily defamed Pitts' character when they presented compromising photographs of Pitts and Welborn at the Alamo Plaza Motel in Jackson.⁸²

Wilson was the only defendant to take the stand and admit his Klan membership—a strategy that backfired on a fellow defendant, Smith, in the state trials. From the witness chair, Wilson revealed that he had joined the Klan in late 1964 and recruited William Thomas Smith, but he contended that he ended his affiliation with the Klan prior to December 1965. He conceded that he affiliated with the Klansmen again after the arrests in the Dahmer case in order to raise money for the defendants. Wilson denied that he knew Bowers and claimed that he only signed a bond for Bowers in the Watkins case because a mutual friend, Charles Blackwell, requested his help. Wilson claimed that Pitts testified against him because Wilson had refused to sign a bond for him. As for his alibi, Wilson confirmed previous testimony by his wife that he lay asleep next to her at the time of Dahmer's murder.⁸³

In closing arguments, Owen argued that “this outrage which was visited on a Negro family was conceived by the leaders of an ultra secret organization for their own warped sense of prestige” because Bowers had wanted to raise the image of the Klan prior to testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Owen sought to appeal to the jurors' sense of humanity and asked them to consider the anguish and horror experienced by the Dahmer family on the night of the Klan attack. Owen also led the

⁸² FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers; “Pitts ‘Sings Again’ In Dahmer Slaying,” *Meridian Star*, May 1, 1969; James H. Downey, “Pitts Testifies No Deal Made,” *The Times Picayune*, May 2, 1969; James H. Downey, “Defense Rests,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 8, 1969.

⁸³ FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers.

jurors to consider the inhumanity of the Klan by reminding them that to the White Knights “people are numbers, killings are numbers, projects are numbers.” He admitted that the government’s witnesses were “not Sunday school teachers” but insisted that the evidence against the defendants was overwhelming.⁸⁴

Some defense attorneys employed federal conspiracy and states’ rights arguments in their summation. Carl Berry, who represented William Thomas Smith, sought to appeal to southern whites fealty to states’ rights and their distaste for federal encroachment by accusing the federal government of fabricating evidence against the defendants in their efforts to eliminate the Ku Klux Klan—an organization with a “long history in the South.” On Saturday, May 10, after deliberating for over 11 hours, the jury acquitted three men—Giles, Lyons, and Thornton. It remained deadlocked, however, on verdicts for Bowers, DeBoxtel, Nix, Noble, Sessum, Smith, and Wilson, and the judge declared seven mistrials. Three of the defendants—Sessum, Wilson, and Smith—returned to prison to serve out their state sentences for their recent murder convictions. Judge Russell ordered the release of DeBoxtel, Nix, and Noble on \$5,000 bonds pending a new trial.⁸⁵

In late July, a little over two months after the conclusion of the federal trial, the state made another attempt to prosecute Sam Bowers for murder. The prosecutors presented the same case it had presented at Bowers’ previous trials. They introduced one new witness, Robert Earl Wilson, a former Klansman who claimed that he had overheard

⁸⁴ James H. Downey, “Dahmer Plot Goes Before Jury,” *Times Picayune*, May 8, 1969, Dahmer Collection.

⁸⁵ Quoting FBI Summary DABURN federal trial, Helfrich Papers. James H. Downey, “Jury Deliberates,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 10, 1969; James H. Downey, “Three Acquitted in Dahmer Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 12, 1969.

Bowers jubilantly boast “Well, what do you think of what my boys did to that Dahmer nigger for me—it’s sure going to take the pressure off me in Washington,” referring to his appearance before HUAC. On cross-examination, Wilson admitted that the FBI had paid him \$1,600 for his work as an informant. The eight white and four black jurors became hopelessly deadlocked eight to four for conviction. Judge Hall declared a mistrial and acted in accordance with the Mississippi statute that required a judge to grant bond to a defendant who has been unsuccessfully prosecuted three times for a capital offense.⁸⁶

On August 26, 1969, Sam Bowers walked out of Forrest County jail a free man. The Dahmers never thought a jury would convict Bowers. Ellie Dahmer knew that the repeated trials “didn’t phase him. He kept that silly little grin on his face all the way through as if he knew nothing was going to happen to him.” Bettie Dahmer theorized that even if the jury had convicted Bowers, he never would have served any time. “It would have been strictly a conviction on paper.” Vernon Dahmer, Jr. noted that the “Klan was Mississippi and Mississippi was the Klan. . . . If whites were not active in the Klan, they were sympathizers with the Klan. So to get a jury to convict the leader of the Klan for killing a black man was difficult.” He concluded: “It was okay to send . . . these Klansmen soldiers to prison . . . [to] sacrifice them. But Sam? No, no. So Sam escaped.” Certainly, he escaped justice in the Dahmer case, but on February 27, 1970, after an exhaustive appeals process in the Neshoba case, the U. S. Supreme Court denied Bowers’ petition for a writ of certiorari. On April 2, federal marshals transported Bowers to McNeil Island Penitentiary in Washington to serve his ten-year federal sentence for his

⁸⁶ Quoting Elliott Chaze, “Surprise Witness,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 25, 1969. Elliott Chaze, “Testimony Begins,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 23, 1969, 1; Elliott Chaze, “Will Jury Believe,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 24, 1969; “Another Mistrial,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 26, 1969.

conviction in the Neshoba case. The Imperial Wizard was finally behind federal prison bars, even if only for a little while.⁸⁷

Between 1969 and 1970, the Mississippi legal system responded ambivalently to the Klan trials and appeals. In February 1969, the Mississippi Supreme Court upheld the conviction of Tallmadge (Billy) Carr for assault and battery against Truman Weber Rogers, and in January of 1970, Jesse White received a five-year sentence for his participation in the attack on Rogers. In 1969 and 1970, the Mississippi Supreme Court rejected appeals by Cecil Sessum and Charles Clifford Wilson on their murder convictions. Mississippi Supreme Court justices also rejected Byrd's appeal. When he claimed that he deserved immunity from prosecution based on his testimony before the grand jury, they reminded him that he had not actually testified in the case. The justices, however, reversed Buckley's conviction on kidnapping charges in the Jack Watkins case on the grounds that the lower court should have prohibited Pitts from admitting to the jury that he "pled guilty in the same case."⁸⁸ Jones County courts produced far worse results.

⁸⁷ First, second, third quotes "Killed by the Klan"; fourth quote, Vernon Dahmer Jr., interview by Re'Tina Gray, April 1, 2001, MOHP recording; "Sam Bowers, Jr.," *Hattiesburg American*, August 26, 1969; SAC, Jackson to Director, April 29, 1970, Bowers FBI File, vol. 9, #157-18-1350, Helfrich Papers.

⁸⁸ Quoting SAC, Jackson to Director, June 3, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 54, #44-1512-4575, Helfrich Papers. "Supreme Court Upholds County Conviction," *The News Commerce*, February 14, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 52, #44-1512-4424; "Sentence White to Five Years," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 24, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4661; SAC, Jackson to Director, May 1, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4703; SAC, Jackson to Director, November 26, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4663; FBI Report, March 20, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, # 44-1512-4689, all in Helfrich Papers. *Mississippi v. Carr, White, Sessum* (1967-1970); James Saggus, "Sessum Murder Conviction Upheld," *Hattiesburg American*, April 14, 1969; *Clifford Wilson v. State of Mississippi*, case no. 45711, Supreme Court of Mississippi, 234 So. 2d 303; 1970 Miss. LEXIS 1404.

After the Dahmer cases, Judge Hall claimed that “the people of Jones County have told me on several occasions—that’s the greatest thing that ever happened for the people of Jones County—when we broke up the Klan.” His claims notwithstanding, the Masonite Klan cases that went to trial in Laurel in 1969 produced disappointing results. In mid-June 1969, District Attorney Harold Odom and Jones County Attorney Robert Sullivan prosecuted Andre Hendry for the murder of Masonite security guard Robert Anthony Billiot. They presented 34 witnesses and substantial evidence, including a tape-recording of Hendry admitting to the murder. After the prosecution concluded their case on a Friday afternoon, Judge Casey granted the defense’s motion to recess until Saturday to give lawyers time to develop their trial plan. However, when court resumed Saturday morning, the defense rested its case without calling a single witness. The jury deliberated for just over an hour before returning to the packed courtroom and acquitting Hendry. Cheers and applause broke out from the majority of the spectators. Few noticed Billiot’s young widow weeping. They rushed instead to the defendant to congratulate him.⁸⁹

The following Monday, the district attorney prosecuted another man charged in the Masonite cases—John C. Humphrey Holifield. The state charged that in the summer of 1967, Holifield had shot into Unit Three of the Masonite Plant, occupied at that time by laborers. Prosecutors presented all of their evidence in less than a full day. Although defense attorneys Carl Ford and Lampkin Butts did not produce a single witness to rebut the state’s case, in less than 12 minutes, the jury acquitted Holifield. These shocking

⁸⁹ Quoting Judge Stanton Hall, interview by Carl Willis, April 14, 1972, vol. 3, 46, MOHP. *Mississippi v. Hendry and Lee* (1967), vol. 5, 486, 530; *State of Mississippi v. Andre Hendry* (June 1969), case no. 3082, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 26, 316, 412 both at Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi. Odell McRae, “Jury Hears Tape in Hendry Trial,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 13, 1969; Odell McRae, “Acquit Hendry in Murder Case,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 16, 1969.

acquittals reflected the great power Klansmen and the strikers who worked with them sustained over Laurel. In both trials the defense failed even to attempt to impeach the state's cases. Finally, the jury deliberations were so short, particularly in Holifield's trial, that it is quite obvious that the jurors failed to consider the prosecution's case. The prosecutors, either out of apathy or because they realized that Jones Countians would not convict Klansmen, decided against pursuing other Masonite Klan cases. On September 19, 1969, they passed the case of Hendry's co-defendant Vander Lee to the files.⁹⁰ Not a single Klansman or striker working with the White Knights ever suffered punishment for their many brutal attacks during the Masonite strike. These acquittals reflected that far too many Jones County whites still perceived Klansmen as the guardians of their white supremacist society and that they supported their transgressions against humanity, even murder, to protect their racial hierarchy.

The Dahmer case had better results, though far from satisfactory. Still, despite the failure of the federal jury to return a single conviction in the DABURN case and the many mistrials in the federal and state cases, journalists, FBI agents, prosecutors, and many locals considered the Dahmer case a watershed in racial justice. In 1991, the editors of the *Hattiesburg American* expressed the common local interpretation of the Dahmer cases when they described them "as important a landmark in the civil rights struggle as were the bloody Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala., marches in 1965 or the three murders in Neshoba County in 1964." James Dukes and Agent J. L. Martin heralded the convictions

⁹⁰ "Plant Shooting Case at Trial," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 6, 1969; "Jury Verdict 'Not Guilty,'" *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 17, 1969. *State of Mississippi v. John C. "Humphrey" Holifield* (1967-1969), case no. 3052, *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 470; *State of Mississippi v. Vander Lee* (June 1967), case no. 3082, *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 26, 412, both at, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi.

as evidence of a racially moderate atmosphere in Forrest County. Martin recalled that “the unique thing about the Dahmer case is that this was local Mississippi prosecutors, prosecuting the Klan in Mississippi courts. This had never been done before. Up until then, the Klan thought they had free rein.” Dukes lauded the jurors as the harbingers of change when he declared, “If there are any heroes” in the trials of the Klansmen, the jurors who had the courage to return guilty verdicts merited the title.⁹¹

The assertions of Forrest County patriarchs notwithstanding, the Central Piney Woods had long been bastions of racism—not moderation. By the close of the DABURN cases, whites still diligently fought to protect their segregated society. In the spring of 1970, they still managed to retain largely segregated schools 16 years after the *Brown* ruling, and the small number of blacks who attended white schools under the Freedom of Choice system confronted persistent mistreatment. Throughout most of the Movement era, both Dukes and Finch had used the courts to suppress black rights and sustain the white supremacist status quo. Their decision in the latter sixties to attack the Klan represented a departure from the past behavior of both the prosecutors and Forrest County’s white citizenry. Surely, the prosecutors and the town of Hattiesburg changed course during the Dahmer case and deserve credit for the resulting convictions. In Forrest County, a substantial number of local whites chose to take a stand against the Klan by supporting the Dahmers through financial, emotional, and legal support. Still, the attack on racial injustice was in an embryonic stage, and most whites remained segregationists

⁹¹ First quote Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Case Key in Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991; second quote, Laura Evans, “Dahmer Case Changed Racial Strife, Ex-FBI agent Says,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 11, 1990, Dahmer Collection; third quote Dukes, “Pursuing a Late Justice.” Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Faced Klan, Saved family,” January 6, 1991, Dahmer Collection.

long after the Dahmer trials. Moreover, many whites across the Central Piney Woods provided financial and emotional support to Klan defendants.⁹² Dukes and Finch had certainly not spent their lives as racially enlightened men struggling for equality in racial justice in a moderate town. Rather, Dahmer's murder intensified federal intervention and encouraged white segregationist authorities to determine that they had to destroy the Klan to save the city, but they also preserved vestiges of white supremacist justice.

Transition rather than watershed best defines the impact of the Dahmer cases on racial justice. Six state mistrials, eight federal mistrials, and three federal acquittals revealed a justice system still struggling with racial bias. At the least, juries sent to prison all of the men who attacked the home—Pitts, Sessum, Smith and Wilson. Perhaps jurors were more inclined to punish those Klansmen who directly caused the death of Dahmer. Racial composition of the juries does not explain the convictions or the mistrials. All-white juries in the Sessum and Byrd cases returned convictions, and juries in many of the mistrials were racially mixed. Jury tampering was an important factor in several of the mistrials; and in several cases, jurors may have voted for an acquittal because they feared the Klan. Finally, the culture of white supremacy, which still possessed a hold over Mississippi, may explain the many mistrials. Ultimately, 12 of the 16 Klansmen indicted in the conspiracy to murder Vernon Dahmer, escaped justice, suggesting that the DABURN case launched a shift, not a revolution, in racial justice in Mississippi.⁹³

⁹² Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Case Key in Struggle for Civil Rights," *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991, Dahmer Collection.

⁹³ Newspaper clipping, *The Clarion-Ledger*, n. d., Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. Ray William Wells, interview, 63-69; Vernon Dahmer Jr., interview by Re'Tina Gray, April 1, 2001; "Killed by the Klan"; Elliott Chaze, "No Surprises," *Hattiesburg*

Still, the DABURN case, in conjunction with other Klan cases, devastated the Klan. The pressure exerted upon the Invisible Empire through the DABURN, MIBURN, Watkins, Rogers, Tarrants, and Masonite investigations caused an internal panic among the Klansmen. Self-preservation proved stronger than the bonds of white supremacist brotherhood. Collectively, the cases against the Invisible Empire triggered a mass defection of members, strained the Klan's fiscal resources, and fostered internal and external betrayals. Bowers made a grave mistake when he tried to enforce the loyalty of his minions through threats and violence, for many of them responded by becoming informants in pivotal cases. The Tarrants case destroyed the Klan's bombing campaign. The Neshoba case sent the Imperial Wizard to prison. The four state convictions in the Dahmer case and the convictions in the related Watkins kidnapping and the Rogers assault cases delivered the mortal blow because it proved that local authorities supported by the state would no longer tolerate Klan violence. The White Knights could not long survive internal mutinies and the external blitzkriegs. The empire cracked and imploded. By the close of the 1960s, the Klan had lost power over the courts and juries and could no longer commit terror across Mississippi with impunity. Although racial injustice persisted as white supremacists used more furtive means to sustain white power, never again would the Klan rule the tortured racial landscape of Mississippi.⁹⁴

American, July 25, 1968; Elliott Chaze, "Testimony Begins," *Hattiesburg American*, November 13, 1968; "Convict Byrd," *Laurel-Leader Call*, November 11, 1968.

⁹⁴ Jack Nelson, "Tough Prosecution Led to Convictions," *Hattiesburg American*, March 19, 1995; Laura Evans, "Dahmer Case Changed Racial Strife, Ex-FBI Agent Says," *Hattiesburg American*, February 11, 1990, both in Dahmer Collection.

CHAPTER X:

STALEMATE: DESEGREGATED AND STILL UNEQUAL

“Nigger,” snarled the white teenager at the black student. With the word that symbolized hundreds of years of black oppression, the racial rage churning at Watkins High School in Laurel in 1970 exploded into mayhem. No one recalled who delivered the first blow, but within moments the crowd around the belligerent students turned into two opposing mobs—blacks attacked whites, and whites attacked blacks. Classroom doors flew open. Students flooded into the corridors. Some of them joined the violence while others, like Larry McGill, tried to flee the danger as the riot spread across campus. Teachers tried to intervene, but they could not stop the full-scale riot that erupted just weeks after the district integrated. The white principal locked himself in his office. Another white administrator initiated the riot preparedness plan. Soon, policemen rushed to the scene with attack dogs. They ignored white students and focused their fury on the black student population at large. At that moment and for most of his days at Watkins High, McGill hated white people. Six years earlier, McGill had joined the student sit-ins and fought for integration. However, the achievement of that Movement goal in 1970 had still failed to produce equality because whites clung to the dying Leviathan of white supremacy and lashed out at the emerging victors of the racial war to stymie, as they perceived it, the final invasion of their segregated world.¹

¹ First quote, Larry Coleman, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009, second quote, Larry McGill, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 24, 2007; Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009; Jamie Bunch, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, all interviews are recordings, in Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP

During the late sixties and early seventies, the final battles of the racial war, which since the winter of 1964 had raged throughout the Central Piney Woods, delivered stalemates to the landscape of racial justice. In the last stretch of the war, some groups suffered definitive defeat, but no one group achieved unconditional victory. The Klan, though decimated, clung to survival in a long march toward marginalization. Although Klan violence fell out of style, the White Knights' racial ideology endured, for as the Invisible Empire collapsed, local government officials assumed the full reins of massive resistance and fought diligently to sustain power over the racial caste system. They controlled school integration and racial justice in a manner that favored whites and oppressed blacks. Civil rights activists battled segregationists at every turn, but they increasingly faced a more amorphous enemy. To make matters worse, the Vietnam War, the antiwar and countercultural revolts, and the rise of racial rioting and black militancy outside the South diverted federal resources and national attention. Consequently, federal authorities vacillated between aiding and ignoring local demands for racial justice. The tumultuous battles and waning federal interest led to perpetual stalemates as the war dissipated into a wounded peace.²

Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited].

² For unequal school integration, see Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 117-223. For the focus on the Vietnam War, counterculture, and race riots, see David Faber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994), 138-261; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 195-419; James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997 edition), 45-553. For the marginalization of the Klan, see Don Whitehead, *Attack on Terror: The*

In 1969, a year before the Watkins riot, the federal government and black activists had attacked one of the most powerful bulwarks of white tyranny, the segregated schools. Mississippi patriarchs feared school integration, perhaps more than any other civil rights mission, and they mustered all their remaining powers to repel it. If the home and the church were breeding grounds for white supremacy, the schoolhouse was the training camp, for it took young minds rooted in racism and socialized them into patriots of white tyranny. Massive resistance commenced in the South in 1954 to thwart implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, as the patriarchs understood that if their children mixed with black students miscegenation may result, which would undermine their racial caste system and terminate white supremacy. Moreover, if the federal government forced whites to share responsibility for the education of their children with black educators, they could not prevent the exposure of their children to teachings that challenged and denounced white supremacy. For years after the *Brown* ruling, Mississippi refused to desegregate. When the federal government sought to enforce school integration through clauses in the Civil Rights Act (1964), Mississippi successfully used its freedom of choice policy to circumvent integration.³

FBI Against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 302-314.

³ For overview of massive resistance to school desegregation in Mississippi, see, Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 117-166. For perceptions of school desegregation and massive resistance in the Central Piney Woods, see Larry McGill, interview; Larry Coleman, interview; Johnny Magee, interview; and Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009; Glenda Funchess, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 23, 2008; William K. Scarborough, interview, by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 25, 2007, all MOHP recordings; and Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account of Efforts to End School Segregation in a Southern School System," *Connexions*, November 17, 2006, <http://cnx.org/content/m14113/latest/> (accessed June 2010), [hereinafter cited as Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account," *Connexions*].

Despite the 1968 U. S. Supreme Court ruling *Green v. County School Board*, which found freedom of choice unconstitutional, and its 1969 decision in *Beatrice Alexander, et al., v. Holmes County Board of Education*, which ordered immediate integration, most Mississippi school districts, including those in the Central Piney Woods, still maintained all-black schools and contained the desegregation of white schools to a minimal black presence. Finally, on November 7, 1969, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) commanded Mississippi schools districts to comply with the court's order using an HEW plan. Mississippi leaders mobilized all their resources to avoid implementing the order. Senator John Stennis introduced a congressional bill which demanded that HEW apply its desegregation of school plans uniformly to every state in the union. Stennis hoped that his colleagues in non-Southern states with mostly segregated schools would resist such efforts and force the federal government to retreat. With the support of Governor John Bell Williams, Mississippi Attorney General A. F. Summer requested attorneys of the Mississippi State Bar to recruit clients to initiate desegregation lawsuits against schools in the North and in the West. On the state and local level, Citizen Councils began opening white-only private academies. Council School Administrator W. J. Simmons characterized these efforts as "lawful opposition to the racial revolution."⁴

⁴ Quoting "Renewed Interest in Citizens Council," *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1969. *Green v. County School Board*, 391 U.S. 430, 88. Ct. 1689, 20 L. Ed. 2d 716 (1968), United States Congress, in *Federal Civil Rights Laws: A Sourcebook*, November 1984, 127; *Beatrice Alexander, et al., v. Holmes County Board of Education, et al.*, 396 U. S. 1218 (September 1969), Series 43; Bill S. 2762-Introduction of Bill to Amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Relating to School Guidelines, August 4, 1969, Congressional Record, vol. 115, n. p., Series 47; School Desegregation, Book I and Statistical Comparisons of Desegregation, September 22, 1970, Ser. 47, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University, Starkville, [hereinafter cited as Stennis

In the Central Piney Woods, University of Southern Mississippi history professor, William K. Scarborough, though still a member of the Jackson White Citizens Council, disagreed with the strategy, because most parents lacked the funding to send their children to private academies. In an effort to preserve segregation in public schools on a local level, Scarborough, Charles Wade, and Ray Davis founded the Committee for Local Control of Education (CLCE). They were particularly irate with the Hattiesburg school board because it voted to comply with the HEW plan, and because it promised to integrate the faculty and extracurricular activities, as well as form biracial faculty and student-faculty committees to oversee integration. The board even pledged to incorporate black history in the curriculum and to acquire books and periodicals for the library that examined African-American topics.⁵

CLCE leaders launched a massive resistance campaign that adopted strategies from both white supremacists and civil rights activists. They employed red-baiting tactics to malign HEW and recruit supporters, while employing lawful means to oppose compliance with the HEW ruling such as boycotts, demonstrations, and lawsuits. During a meeting held at the University of Southern Mississippi auditorium, CLCE leader Ray Davis denounced HEW as a communist organization because it ignored the desires of the people, and he called for a county-wide boycott of Forrest County schools. On December 11, 1969, only 18.4 percent of the students attended Central Attendance Center, only 3.3

Collection and MSU]. "Governor's Plan Has Been Talked Before," *Hattiesburg American*, December 13, 1969, 2; A. F. Summer to Each Member of the Mississippi State Bar, December 17, 1969, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg; [hereinafter cited as HMR] "County Schools Must Put HEW Plan into Effect," *Hattiesburg American*, November 7, 1969.

⁵ William K. Scarborough, interview; Forrest County Consolidated School District II: Recommendations for School Desegregation, 1969-1970, HMR.

percent attended Petal Junior High, and only 41 of 497 students attended North Forrest High School. Parents surrounded the schools with signs that declared, “We Want Public Schools, but not run by HEW.” Seventy-three teachers endorsed a letter to the editor of the *Hattiesburg American* calling the HEW plan unconstitutional, as it suppressed the people’s right to freedom of choice. They also noted that the federal government had placed the burden of integration primarily, if not wholly, on the South. The Petal High School Student Council and 700 students signed a resolution that condemned the HEW plan as unconstitutional because it deprived students of the choice to attend schools in their own residential areas. The few whites who sent their children to school, in violation of the boycott, received threats. County Attorney Jimmy Dukes, though claiming that, he, like many others, disagreed with the court decision, asserted that he would not tolerate threats or physical violence as a method of opposing the decision.⁶

On January 3, 1970, Governor John Bell Williams acknowledged that Mississippi had lost its nearly 16-year war against school desegregation. The governor stood before television cameras and announced with great anguish that rulings by “witch doctors of the pseudo-liberal left and their fellow revolutionaries,” and the “fawning Federal Administration” had defeated the state’s freedom of choice policy. He conceded that for the moment these deplorable enemies had emerged victorious when he noted, “I am frank to tell you that our arsenal of legal and legislative weapons have been exhausted.”

⁶ Quoting, “Boycott is Clamped on County Schools,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 11, 1969. “CLCE President Explains Purpose, Invites Support,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 22, 1969; William K. Scarborough, interview; “School Boycott, Picketing is Called for Thursday,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 10, 1969; Letter to the Editor, “County Teachers Protest Federal Intervention in School System,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 31, 1969; “Prosecutor Says Violence Will Not Be Tolerated,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 13, 1969; “Petal High Students Adopt Resolution Opposing HEW Plan,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 8, 1969.

Although he promised he would try to reinstate freedom of choice, his overall speech sounded the death knell of the segregated system. He called on white citizens to respond to the news with restraint, as resistance would prove an exercise in futility. He implored them to follow the model of their Confederate forebears who had survived Reconstruction with dignity and persevered in their struggle against oppression. Williams refused to abolish public schools to prevent integration. Instead, he encouraged whites to send their children to private academies and proposed a bill that would allot families \$150.00 in state government loans for private school tuition and would allow people to direct up to \$500 in taxes that they owed the state from the state treasury to a private school.⁷

In the spring of 1970, many school boards throughout the South, particularly in Mississippi, simply refused to comply with the HEW regulations. By July 13, the Department of Justice had initiated 189 desegregation lawsuits in 11 Southern states—45 of them were in Mississippi. School districts not in full compliance included Hattiesburg and Laurel. Not a single white student attended the historically black schools in the Hattiesburg Municipal, Laurel Separate, and Jones County districts. A paltry number of black students attended historically white schools in the Central Piney Woods with blacks comprising 130 out of 2,803 students in the Laurel Separate District, 129 out of 1,672 students in the Jones District, and 453 out of 3,527 students in the Hattiesburg Municipal District. Laurel's black schools employed three white teachers out of 148 and failed to employ a single black teacher in the white schools. In the Jones County District, all of the

⁷ Quoting John Bell Williams, speech, January 3, 1970, Record Group 27, Mississippi Governors' Papers, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as RG 27, MDAH]; "Aid to Private Schools May Cost \$20 Million," *Hattiesburg American*, August 20, 1969.

67 black teachers taught in the black schools, and all of the 242 white teachers worked in the white schools. The Hattiesburg Municipal District employed three black teachers out of the 115 faculty members in white schools, and 12 white teachers out of the 216 faculty members in black schools.⁸

During these final battles, the minority of black students attending white Hattiesburg schools under the freedom of choice plan suffered as white rage exploded. During the 1969/1970 school year, Anthony Harris and Kenneth Fairley were among the dozens of students attending predominantly white Blair High School. Harris, who at 16-years-old, was already a Movement veteran and who was one of the first black students to desegregate Thames Junior High, had grown intimately familiar with racial prejudice. Still, he was shocked by the racism of the administrators and some of his teachers at Blair High. On one occasion, a teacher sent him to the assistant principal's office because he was wearing a dashiki. The assistant principal, Reese Snell, ordered him never to wear it again. Harris replied, "It's a traditional African shirt. For me, it represents pride in my heritage." Snell responded, "This ain't Africa . . . [if I] let you wear it, every colored in the school will want to wear 'em. Before you know it, we gonna have a race war." He informed Harris in no uncertain terms that Blair was a "white school," and Harris had to "abide by our way . . . And now, anytime you want to transfer to Rowan so you can wear your dashiki and be with your own kind, I'll be more than happy to arrange for you to transfer." Although angered by the insult, Harris never wore the dashiki to school again.

⁸ Statement of Assistant Attorney General Jerris Leonard Before Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity United States Senate, July 13, 1970, figures from Appendix A, Mississippi Fall 1969 Elementary and Secondary School Survey; Assistant Attorney General Jerris Leonard to Mississippi State Board of Education, April 17, 1970, both in Ser. 47, Stennis Collection. Sam Spinks, interview by Charles Bolton, September 15, 1997, vol. 693, 25- 26, MOHP.

Harris had long before determined that he would conquer white supremacy daily by staying in school and advancing desegregation; and he would not allow whites to drive him from the campus no matter the hardships he suffered.⁹

Nonetheless, the blatant racism often stirred rage in Harris, and at times it proved impossible to remain silent in the face of disparaging remarks, particularly when teachers spread racial lies in their classrooms. One day during history class, Harris' teacher grew enraged as he read to the class from their textbook an assertion that slavery was an inhumane and exploitative institution. Suddenly, he slammed the book down on the desk and launched into a rant defending slavery as a perfect system because Africans lacked intellectual capabilities to pursue other endeavors. He also claimed that it had rescued them from the barbaric continent of Africa where they lived in squalor, and it introduced them to the civilizing influence of Christianity. Slavery, he insisted was a benevolent system. He concluded that slaves were grateful to their masters and accepted their proper place in southern society. Harris could no longer contain himself; suddenly, he shouted, "You are wrong and slavery was wrong." The teacher ordered Harris to never contradict him again. Harris gathered his belongings and left the class. During such conflicts, Harris worried that whites might force him off the campus. The principal had transferred a black teenager to Rowan earlier that year after a teacher confiscated a series of love notes exchanged between him and a white girl. Although no official rules prohibited interracial dating, white patriarchs had long fought integration precisely because of their fear of

⁹ Quoting Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account," *Connexions. S. H. Blair High School L'il Miss. Yearbook*, 1969, Hattiesburg High School Library, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Blair High School Yearbook*, 1969].

miscegenation between black males and white females. Harris and Kenneth Fairley, however, survived the year and advanced the cause of desegregation.¹⁰

Fairley had spent the previous two years under freedom of choice at Hawkins Junior High where he faced considerable prejudice, but nothing prepared him for the vicious racism he confronted in the high school. When Fairley and four other black students decided to try out for the all-white football team, most of the coaches and players terrorized them until all but Fairley quit. When the fourth black athlete had turned in his equipment, Fairley decided to quit too because he feared suffering the daily tortures alone. He struggled with his decision because his father had never allowed him to quit any team or activity until the season or the project was complete. As he approached Coach Stan Hathorne's office, he overheard him say to a trainer, "four niggers down and one to go." Fairley stopped and turned around because the racial slur reminded him that his suffering had meaning—that it would help facilitate integration and black liberation. He would not quit.¹¹

The coaches and white players were still determined to force him off the team. On the field, the coaches ordered him to stand alone on special teams, and when the kicker punted the ball to him, the entire team ran down the field and tackled him. In the locker rooms, the players treated him like a pariah. When he entered the shower, the rest of the players rushed out. Many white players found it particularly hilarious to urinate on his clothes and equipment. The football staff laundered all the player's uniforms, but they

¹⁰ Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account," *Connexions*.

¹¹ Quoting Kenneth Fairley interview, May 8, 2009; *S. H. Blair High School L'il Miss. Yearbook, 1970*, 145-146, Hattiesburg High School Library, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Blair High School, 1970*].

refused to wash Fairley's. When the season began, the team traveled throughout much of Mississippi and patronized restaurants that, despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, refused to serve blacks. So Fairley would sit alone and hungry on the bus while his teammates dined.¹²

The cruelties piled on top of each other until one day during a practice session, Fairley reached a breaking point. The players practiced at the junior high field located a few miles away. On this day, the bus broke down and the coaches ordered the players to carpool to the field. Fairley did not have a vehicle, and though he begged the white players to transport him, they all refused. One player shouted, "no nigger, walk." Fairley ran the few miles to the field, but of course he arrived late. When he rushed down the steps to the complex where the coach and the team waited, Coach Hathorne slapped a wooden board across his hand and asked "Boy, where have you been?" Fairley responded, "I tried to get a ride over and I just ran over." The coach turned toward the team, "did he ask any of you all for a ride?" "No sir," the players lied. He ordered Fairley to assume the position and he delivered ten excessive licks. Afterward, Fairley went to the locker room to change into his practice clothes. He sat on the bench, and he stifled the pain welling inside of him; he would not "let them see me cry." For the first time in awhile, he contemplated quitting.¹³

Then, one of the white players, Steve Kelly, entered the locker room, sat next to Fairley and said, "I have had enough of it . . . today it's going to change." Fairley was not exactly sure what he meant, but Kelly had treated him decently. Fairley had often seen

¹² Kenneth Fairley interview, May 8, 2009.

¹³ Ibid.

Kelly read his Bible before practice and considered him one of those white Christians who practiced Christ's teachings. When Fairley returned to the field, Coach Hathorne, as usual, ordered him to retrieve the kick-off alone. As soon as the coach blew the whistle, Kelly shouted, "the seniors versus the sophomore," and he punched one senior and then another. Enraged, the seniors started hitting back and soon a massive brawl erupted. The coaches broke it up and berated Kelly for starting the fight. Kelly shouted that "enough was enough," and he would no longer allow the coaches or the team to mistreat Fairley. When they laughed at him, he threatened to expose their actions to the media. The coaches ran Kelly after practice, but the cruel treatment of Fairley began to diminish, though the coaches rarely allowed Fairley to play.¹⁴

During the last game of the year, Blair High School played Biloxi High School, which fielded 11 black athletes. Biloxi was winning handily. Finally, Coach Hathorne shouted for Fairley to take the field, but he called him "Willie" because the coach never bothered to learn his name. He just called all black kids "Willie or Leroy." Fairley refused to leave the bench and decided he would not play the next year. Although he had loved sports all of his life and was highly competitive, he felt no sorrow when Blair lost. Yet it was at that moment that Coach Hathorne realized his underestimation of Fairley's talent. After the game, while Fairley was clearing out his locker, Coach Hathorne approached him in the locker room and sat down beside him. "I want you to know that you're more of a man than I will ever be. What we put on you has been so unfair. I want you to forgive me." As he was leaving, he turned and said, "By the way if you have any friends that want to come out for football next year, I'd like for you to bring them."

¹⁴ Ibid.

Doubtless, the embarrassing defeat by Biloxi influenced Hathorne's sudden remorse. Still, Fairley's courage and tenacity in the face of great personal adversity had forced Hathorne, one of his greatest abusers, to recognize his talent, and to apologize for his cruelty. Fairley had also inspired progressive whites like Kelly to break their silence and oppose the white supremacist system. Still, Fairley held out hope that the federal government would force Blair High School to integrate the following year to mitigate his suffering.¹⁵

During the fall of 1970, most Mississippi schools integrated under court orders. In Hattiesburg and Laurel, however, school boards managed a compromise with HEW—they would desegregate on the secondary level but maintain segregated elementary schools. Hattiesburg managed to broker such a compromise because the local NAACP and the biracial school district committee endorsed the proposal, and the Hub City's Republican Mayor Paul Grady had connections in Washington D. C. which allowed him to finesse such a deal. Still dissatisfied, local whites persisted in their resistance to desegregation of secondary schools. On September 8, 1970, 100 white parents staged sit-ins at Dixie and Central schools, which set the stage for creation of a private school. However, such efforts proved more difficult to sustain when on September 16 Judge Harold Cox barred the state of Mississippi from providing tuition loans to parents sending their children to private academies.¹⁶

¹⁵ Quoting Kenneth Fairley interview, May 8, 2009. *Blair High School Yearbook, 1970*, 145. In the interview, Fairley mistakenly refers to Blair High's opponent as Gulfport. According to the yearbook, Blair High School played and lost to Biloxi High School in the last game.

¹⁶ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 188; Sam Spinks, 25- 26, MOHP; "No State Loans to Students in Private Schools," *Hattiesburg American*, September 16, 1970; "Sit-

In Jones County, segregationists built a private academy for whites, but many whites could not afford or did not want to pay school tuition. To soothe the transition to integration, Laurel Mayor Bill Patrick and Reverend Robert Marsh held a public meeting at which white parents and children could express their concerns. Many parents feared for their children's safety because they had read stories about black students attacking white students in integrated schools in other states. The children were afraid too. Twelve-year-old Charles Marsh became terrified about the prospect of attending an integrated school when a white friend planning to attend a segregated academy informed him that he was "crazy to be going to school with niggers," and suggested that they would harm him. Surely some white parents knew that their children had attacked the few blacks who had attended white schools under freedom of choice and worried about black retribution. Yet in the end, most whites decided against paying to send their children to academies in aluminum buildings with poorly trained teachers and a lack of supplies. They might not have changed their views on race, but they would try the integrated public school route.¹⁷

Regrettably, the white patriarchs rendered a peaceful transition nearly impossible because they ensured that school integration transpired in a discriminatory manner that favored whites. When consolidating the schools, the white school boards demoted black administrators and deprived black faculty and staff of power commensurate with their white counterparts. Black principals became vice principals and coaches became assistant coaches, and some were even demoted from high schools to junior highs. Moreover, the

ins at Central and Dixie as Classes Open," *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1970; "Parents Plan to Organize Private School," *Hattiesburg American*, September 17, 1970.

¹⁷ Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 247-253.

white school establishment in Hattiesburg maintained a degree of segregation through the 1970/71 school year when it gerrymandered neighborhood district lines so that blacks would comprise only 25 percent of the Blair High School population and Rowan High School would remain nearly all-black. In general, African Americans supported the district lines because the black community harbored a great love and fealty for Rowan High School, and few black teenagers wished to leave behind their beloved campus, friends, and traditions. Many African Americans who lived in the Blair High School district used a relative or friend's address so they could attend Rowan. A year earlier at a biracial Catholic conference, a black teenage activist, Deborah Denard, expressed a common sentiment among black teenagers when she presented a paper arguing that blacks desired school integration not because they desired fellowship with whites but because white-controlled segregation ensured that white schools received greater funding and fostered racial inequity. During the first year of school integration, Denard, to her great relief, remained in the Rowan district, and she never had to attend Blair High School.¹⁸

Kenneth Fairley and Johnny DuPree, best friends who were both in the Blair High School district for their junior year, responded differently to the desegregation orders. For the first time in years, Fairley looked forward to the opening of the school year. He believed that the influx of black students and teachers would finally mitigate the suffering

¹⁸ Field Director's Annual Report, Mississippi State Conference NAACP 1970, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 6, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Microfilm, [hereinafter cited as NAACP Papers]; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 247; Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account," *Connexions*; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 8, 2009, MOHP recording; "All Quiet as School Registration Begins," *Hattiesburg American*, September 1, 1970.

he had experienced under freedom of choice. In contrast, DuPree, who had excelled in academics and sports in the black schools, arrived at Blair High School with reluctance and trepidation. As the son of a domestic, he had stayed on the “fringes” of the Movement because his single mother feared it, and his church, Mt. Carmel Baptist, disdained involvement. Still, like all African Americans, he had experienced the cruelties of growing up in a segregated world. Whenever he and Fairley took a lunch break at the Burger House located near the Magic Tone Carwash where they worked, he always noticed the whites walking into the restaurant and enjoying the shelter that protected them from the heat in the summers and the cold in the winters, while he and Fairley waited at the back window either shivering or sweating until all the whites were served. He never forgot the day on Adeline Street when he and Fairley knocked on a white woman’s front door to ask if she was interested in hiring them to mow her yard. She shouted at them, “Niggers go to the back; they don’t come to the front of my house.” DuPree expected that he would face similar indignities at Blair High School.¹⁹

DuPree never expected, however, that a white adult would request him to turn on his black classmates, and Fairley never expected that blacks would turn against him. At the beginning of the school year, the white principal, D. I. Patrick, called DuPree into his office and asked him to serve as the liaison between black and white students. The manner in which Patrick made the request, however, convinced DuPree that he wanted him to act as his “snitch.” Instead, DuPree moved to Washington D. C. to live with his grandmother. Soon afterward, his estranged father fell ill. DuPree’s mother implored DuPree to come home to reconnect with his dying father. So DuPree returned to

¹⁹ Quoting Johnny DuPree, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recording. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

Hattiesburg, but by using another address, he attended Rowan High. Fairley remained at Blair High, where to his great shock and frustration, some blacks treated Fairley like an Uncle Tom. They incorrectly believed that he had chosen to attend white schools under freedom of choice because of his fealty toward whites. When Fairley approached his history class, a black teacher, Marjorie Chambers, who opposed integration and her transfer to Blair, told him bluntly, "I want you to find another room, another teacher. . . . I don't need any Uncle Toms in here." The attack wounded Fairley, particularly because she was one of the most beloved black teachers at Rowan High School. "Mrs. Chambers," he said with a confidence he did not feel, "they've been trying to run me away from here for years and I'll be doggoned if I am going to let you run me away. I'll be in your class."²⁰

Fairley determined to prove to his black teachers and new black classmates that he was a devoted civil rights activist. So, when black students and the leaders of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP launched demonstrations against the persistence of racial prejudice in the administration of the desegregated schools, Fairley not only joined them but tried to become a student leader in the protest. Black anger over the racist implementation of school desegregation exploded into rage in the winter of 1971 after Commissioners Walter Park and Ford Vance appointed two white men, George Komp and Howard Myrick, to Hattiesburg's school board vacancies. Clarence E. Magee, president of the Forrest County NAACP and a teacher, publicly castigated the city fathers for reneging on its 1966 promise to consider a black candidate when a position on the

²⁰ First and second quotes, Johnny DuPree; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. *S. H. Blair High School L'il Miss. Yearbook*, 1971, Hattiesburg High School Library, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Blair High School*, 1971].

board became available. In a letter to the *Hattiesburg American*, NAACP member Reverend Ervin E. Grimmett condemned the appointments as “an act of chicanery and deception, a lick below the belt, a deliberate attempt to maintain the status quo . . . a denial of the principle of Christian brotherhood. It is tantamount to taxation without representation. It is a detriment to the ‘peace and tranquility’ about which we have heard so much from City Hall.” He emphasized that Clarksdale, Meridian, and Starkville had all appointed blacks to their school boards and declared that Hattiesburg lagged behind.²¹

The outrage expressed by the NAACP inspired local black students. In early March 1971, 300 black students from Blair and Rowan High Schools staged a walkout, both to protest the failure of the city to appoint a black member to the school board and to dramatize demands students had given to school officials. Clarence Magee joined them. Many of the student demands included provisions contained in the school board’s HEW plan, which the board had failed to implement. First, to fulfill the provision of equal integration of faculty and staff, students insisted that the board must hire more black teachers, coaches, staff members, and a black counselor. Second, it must ensure proportional representation of blacks on school committees, pep squads, and the school newspaper. Third, the board must include a black studies curriculum as promised. Fourth, the students insisted that the board form the biracial student-faculty committee it pledged to create to oversee the transition to integration. Finally, as many black students had

²¹ Quoting, Reverend Ervin E. Grimmett, Letter to the Editor, *Hattiesburg American*, February 9, 1971, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers. Virginia Woodward, “George Komp, Howard Myrick Appointed to City School Board,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 5, 1971; “NAACP Will Work to Get Black Member on Local School Board,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 5, 1971, both in Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers. Clarence Magee, interview, by Patricia Boyett September 24, 2008, MOHP recording.

grown weary of discriminatory treatment by white administrators, they also demanded that the white staff cease in their efforts to intimidate black students and that white teachers show black and white students equal respect. To ensure equitable treatment, they demanded that the board develop a disciplinary committee comprised of black and white students and faculty to hear appeals. The student protest revealed a powerful desire by the black students to have more control over their educational and extracurricular experiences. At Blair, they wanted to be treated as an integral part of the campus rather than as unwanted interlopers in a hostile environment. At Rowan, they wanted more control over their school, which was still mostly black.²²

The white city fathers quashed the black revolt and tried to sustain full white control over the schools. Judge Stanton Hall handed down a temporary injunction to prohibit further protests on Hattiesburg school property as well as on all public buildings, streets, and sidewalks because he claimed that the protests had caused disruption of education. The injunction certainly limited the ability of blacks to pressure officials to appoint a black board member and to address student grievances. Although Mayor Paul Grady agreed that, as one-third of the school children were black, the board should have black representation, nothing changed. The following year, under federal pressure, school authorities with the blessings of a biracial committee selected by Superintendent Sam Spinks completely integrated the high schools by sending all the sophomores in the city to Rowan and all the juniors and seniors to Blair High School. The new arrangement had

²² “300 Negro Students March in Support of Grievances” *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 1971; “Black Students at Blair Submit ‘Grievance List,’” *Hattiesburg American*, n. d., Pt 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers; Clarence Magee, interview; Minutes Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, March 19, 1971, Sovereignty Commission Records #99-128-0-1-3-1-1, MDAH, Digital Archive, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR#, MDAH].

the potential to improve integration efforts as it more equally balanced the black administrative, teacher, and student population in the schools and should have increased the power of the black voice. Regrettably, white school authorities prevented such a development.²³

Integration once again occurred on grounds that diminished the power of African Americans and disregarded the value of black administrators, staff, faculty, and students. White school authorities demoted black principals and administrators into subordinate positions. Rowan's beloved band director, James Winters, was demoted to assistant band director at Blair. Despite the fact that Rowan boasted one of the premier athletic programs in the state, not a single black coach became a head coach at Blair High. Rowan's football coach, Ed Steele, who had won four championships in seven years and had the best record of all coaches in the state, was demoted to the coordinator of recreation at Blair High school. White patriarchs and administrators not only divested these black educators of their rightfully earned positions, but they deprived black students of their influence by diminishing their roles in their schools and weakening their power to protect them.²⁴

White administrators, teachers, and coaches also disregarded and discarded the traditions and culture of black students. African American student Rod Woullard recalled

²³ "Injunction Orders Students Not to Demonstrate," *Hattiesburg American*, March 3, 1971, "NAACP Will Work to Get Black Member on Local School Board," *Hattiesburg American*, February 5, 1971; George Komp, "Howard Myrick Appointed to City School Board," *Hattiesburg American*, February 5, 1971, all in Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Sam Spinks, interview, 26-30. Rod Woullard, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009, MOHP recording.

²⁴ Rod Woullard, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Anthony Harris, "A Personal Account," *Connexions*.

that “they wanted us to assimilate, not integrate.” The band leadership let black musicians know that the band would play the music it always had at Blair and would not incorporate any of the music arrangements from the Rowan band. Woullard overheard a football trainer ask the Blair head coach if he wanted to use the Rowan jerseys for practice. The coach responded, “You can burn that crap. Our boys will never wear them.” Woullard was infuriated, for “these were our game jerseys which we treasured [while] playing at Rowan, and the legacy that Rowan had, and the state championship that they had, that [Blair] had never had. So now they are telling us that none of that has any value where you are now. None of that means anything.” Principal Patrick reinforced that message. During a pep rally, when the band surprised the black students by playing an old Blues song, “You Give Me Fever,” a black girl began dancing, and as Fairley recalled, “everyone got loose because she started dancing. And the principal reached over and grabbed her and said we will not have that kind of ‘ism in here meaning like niggerism.”²⁵

Enraged, Fairley, Woullard, and most of the black students staged a walkout. When the black sophomores at Rowan learned of the incident, they left their campus and joined the protest. Through the walkout, black students evinced their refusal to be treated as interlopers and demanded that whites view their contributions as equally meritorious. Johnny DuPree recalled that attending Blair was like visiting the home of an acquaintance as he remarked, “You can stay for a little while and then it’s time to go. Well, there was nowhere for us to go. It was someone else’s school. We had no history

²⁵ First, second, and third quotes, Rod Woullard, interview; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Anthony Harris, “A Personal Account,” *Connexions*.

there. The walls didn't talk to us. We were there as visitors not as members It was difficult to adjust to that." White authorities had tried to suffocate all black expression and worth in a tangible and visible manner that propelled black frustration to the surface. Most of the black students refused to divest themselves of their history, of their culture, of their merit. They chose instead to leave, and in that act, they hoped to force white authorities to see them as equal human beings with ideas, cultural expressions, and talents that were as valuable as those of their white counterparts. They wanted to integrate, not assimilate.²⁶

Roscoe Pickett, the black assistant principal of Blair High School, helped the black students organize their anger into a productive campaign for equal treatment. He held a forum at which black students discussed their grievances, and then he selected seven of them, including Woullard and Fairley to present these complaints to the superintendent. When Pickett mentioned Fairley's name, several students protested that he was untrustworthy because he had been attending school with whites for so long. The rejection wounded Fairley as he realized that, with few exceptions, neither white nor black students accepted him. Yet Pickett continued to defend Fairley, and after awhile the students realized that Fairley had spent years fighting white racism. They allowed him to serve on the black student board, and increasingly they turned to him for leadership in racial conflicts. On several occasions, Fairley, Woullard, and several other students on the black student board met with the white administration to present black grievances. After a series of talks, the students and the administration formed an advisory counsel

²⁶ Quoting Johnny DuPree, interview. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; *S. H. Blair High School L'il Miss. Yearbook*, 1972, 5, 82-83, Hattiesburg High School Library, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Blair High School*, 1972].

comprised of students and administrators of both races to facilitate a transition to a truly integrated campus. Students like DuPree, Fairley, and Woullard further advanced their demands for equal treatment by excelling in their academic endeavors and disproving myths of black intellectual inferiority. Blacks also defied white efforts to undermine black pride and denigrate black beauty when they united to ensure the election of a black homecoming queen, Wanda Johnson, by running one black candidate against several white candidates. With the white vote split, Johnson won.²⁷

In the early months of 1972, African Americans achieved more tangible changes in the schools. On February 14, 1972, the city announced the appointments of a black man, Jesse Parker, and a white woman, Eleanor Gerrard, to the school board. Board member Ralph Milloy resigned to help facilitate the appointment of Parker. Clarence Magee and Reverend Ervin E. Gimmitt praised the black community and the city officials who worked to appoint Parker. On campus, the white basketball head coach guided his white and black players to unite as one team. He succeeded, in part, because a black player, Eugene Short, who eventually played for the New York Knicks, proved so exceptional that he led Blair in an undefeated season and to a victory in its first state championship. The winning season, according to Fairley, eradicated many of the racial barriers between white and black students.²⁸

²⁷ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Glenda Funchess, interview; Johnny DuPree, interview; Rod Woullard, interview; *Blair High School. Yearbook*, 1972, 14, 24-25, 35, 67, 82, 90, 98-99.

²⁸ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; "NAACP Chief Commends School Board Appointees," *Hattiesburg American*, February 15, 1971; Reverend E. Grimmitt, "Minister Praises School Board Member Who Resigned," *Hattiesburg American*, February 16, 1972, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers; Mayor Paul Grady and

White students like Donnie McCleskey and Billy McGee also helped crack racial barriers. McCleskey considered DuPree a likable person, so he befriended him. Every time McCleskey served as team captain in gym class, he selected DuPree because of their friendship and because he considered DuPree a great basketball player. McCleskey's friends heckled him for his friendship with DuPree, but McCleskey ignored them. DuPree recalled that "he would always talk to me. He didn't make me feel like I had a big X on my chest. He made me feel like a human being." Similarly, most black students liked Billy McGee. Billy's father, Bob McGee, a deeply religious member of the Church of Christ who believed that Christian fellowship stretched across racial barriers, worked as a laborer on the railroads for years and then as a deputy sheriff. Because many wealthy white students disdained the white working class, Billy McGee experienced the cruelties of class prejudice. McGee refused to allow anyone to mistreat him, no matter their race or class. As Fairley recalled, "Billy didn't mess with anyone, but if you crossed him, it was a battle."²⁹

Unfortunately, some white teachers, coaches, and students remained intransigent segregationists, and they continued to mistreat blacks. When several black players, including Fairley, qualified for the junior Olympics in track, Coach Jerry Smith refused to drive them to the event with the other white players. He handed them bus tickets instead. Smith eventually divested himself of his racist beliefs. Decades later when Fairley confronted Smith, the old coach wept, expressed his regrets, and asked for

Commissioner Trustee of the Hattiesburg Municipal School, appointments, February 14, 1972, HMR; Johnny DuPree, interview; *Blair High School Yearbook*, 1972, 84-89.

²⁹ First quote Johnny DuPree, interview; second quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 7, 2009, MOHP recording.

forgiveness. Fairley noted, “He has a good heart. It was the sign of the times. . . . He thought it was improper for us all to be in the car together.” Many white administrators and parents in those days continued to fear interracial socializing to the point that they canceled the school prom—at least for blacks. White parents ensured that their children still enjoyed the long beloved school event by holding an all-white prom at the Hattiesburg Country Club.³⁰

Despite, or perhaps because of, the racial struggles, the Blair High School class of 1972 proved exceptional. Over the next several decades, many graduates became successful leaders in their communities and others succeeded outside of the Central Piney Woods. Graduates included whites like Sheriff Billy McGee, successful architects Donnie McCleskey and Larry Albert, and college baseball coach Corky Palmer, who later led the USM team to its first world series; and blacks like Kenneth Fairley, a minister and civil rights leader who made his fortune as a sports agent and entrepreneur, Detroit talk show host Mildred Gaddis, NBA Basketball player Eugene Short, and Johnny Dupree—the first black mayor of Hattiesburg. DuPree, Fairley, and McGee later recalled the class of 1972 with fondness, and noted that the friendships forged across racial divides in that trying year survived the racial struggles that followed. Prior to integration, white and black youths had little interaction, and an abyss of diverging experiences separated them. Integration, as DuPree recalled, “catapulted us into adulthood at an earlier stage” and forced them to confront the prejudices that separated them. DuPree concluded, “There

³⁰ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; *Blair High School Yearbook*, 1972, 90.

was this big gulf . . . That gulf was removed and we joined.”³¹

For the students living in the Forrest County school district, the first year of integration proved an even more trying time. The authorities spread the black student population between four schools, Petal, North Forrest, Brooklyn, and Forrest County Agricultural High School so they were greatly outnumbered by whites. When former Freedom Summer School students, Lillie and Carol Jackson, stepped off the bus and entered Petal High “all the white kids got to both sides of the hall and we had to parade to our classes.” Some whites treated them nicely and some with indifference, but there were more than a few who would gather with others in a crowd and shout “nigger” as black students passed by them. The white-dominated administration often excluded blacks from extracurricular activities like the prom. Although the school eventually allowed blacks to play football, years passed before they integrated the cheerleading squad. In general, blacks were excluded from social events. The few black administrators, coaches, and teachers suffered similar mistreatment. They were far outnumbered and had been demoted. Carol Jackson found the transition from the beloved black community to an integrated world under white control devastating. Still, both sisters received good grades and went on to become successful professionals—Lillie became a nurse and Carol a

³¹ Quoting, Johnny DuPree, interview. Billy McGee, interview, Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Glenda Funchess, interview; Rachel Leifer, “Architect Leaves Mark on Hattiesburg,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 2006; Kevin Walters, “Inauguration Set Today for City’s First Black Mayor,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 2, 2001; Gaddis, Mildred, NewsTalk 1200, Detroit Now, WCHBAM, October 15, 2009, <http://wchbnewsdetroit.com/schedule/mildredgaddis/mildred-gaddis/> (accessed October 2009); Roscoe Nance, “NBA Players Pledge Further Support to Gulf Coast,” *USA Today*, September 28, 2006, website: http://www.usatoday.com/sports/basketball/nba/2005-09-06-players-relief_x.htm (accessed October 2006); Corky Palmer, USM head baseball coach, biography, website: http://southernmiss.cstv.com/sports/m-basebl/mtt/palmer_corky00.html.

teacher.³² The integration of the high schools in Forrest County and Hattiesburg had proceeded with hostility, but the racial relations had greatly improved since the early days of freedom of choice. Laurel experienced an opposite trend in its high school, as angry whites violently resisted integration on a much larger scale than they had opposed freedom of choice.

The white leaders in Laurel set an ugly tone for integration in the summer of 1970 when they sent several white employees and janitors into Oak Park High to clean out the school and prepare for its transition to an elementary school. All Laurel high school students were slated to attend the once whites-only Watkins High. African Americans in Jones County revered Oak Park as one of their proudest institutions. Since the 1920s, it had served as a second home to the black children who viewed their teachers, coaches, and administrators as their extended family. The school sent many of its graduates to college and prepared them for prestigious careers as brain surgeons, athletes, entertainers, and military leaders. Leontyne Price, a famous singer, and her brother, Colonel George Price, both graduated from Oak Park. The white workers who marched into Oak Park in the summer of 1970 cared nothing about the school's proud history or the fealty of the black community to its hallowed halls. They "stripped" Oak Park bare of its memories. They ripped pictures of teachers, graduation classes, sports teams, and academic organizations off the walls and tossed them along with the numerous trophies into trashcans. They hurled the coveted football uniforms into heaps to be burned. By the time the black principal, Alex Warren, and the teachers learned of the deed and rushed to the school, it was too late. Blacks were outraged that the white powers had thrown Oak Park

³² Carol Jackson Preyor and Lillie Jackson Easton, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 26, 2008, MOHP recording.

into the trash.³³

The rape of Oak Park served as the opening assault against black students and faculty in integrated Laurel schools. Most of the whites affiliated with Watkins High School perceived the federally ordered integration as a black invasion of their beloved campus. The white leaders could no longer prevent full-scale integration, but they could ensure that it transpired in a manner that sustained white power and that the school system remained, if not separate, racially unequal. White authorities demoted black principals and coaches to assistant positions and sent some of them to the junior highs. Oak Park Principal Alex Warren became the lowest ranked assistant principal at Watkins High. Coach Irving Morrell, who had become an All-American center while playing for Grambling University and who had led the Oak Park High School basketball team to three district championships, was demoted to the coach of the integrated junior high school. School authorities also divested the assistant positions of authority normally ascribed to them, rendering black administrators and coaches nearly impotent. They even limited the authority of black teachers in their classrooms when they forbade them from disciplining unruly white students. Clearly, the white administrators tried to sustain white authority by creating a racial hierarchy in the schools in which all white employees enjoyed superior positions to their black counterparts and in which white children were ascribed a higher status than black adults.³⁴

³³ Quoting Larry Coleman, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009, MOHP recording. Johnny Magee, interview; Gladys Austin, by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009, MOHP recording; Cleveland Payne, *The Oak Park Story: A Cultural History, 1928-1970* (United States of America: National Oak Park Alumni Association), 1998.

The hundreds of black teenagers sent to integrate Watkins High School and win a significant battle against the Jim Crow system by terminating the separate school systems accomplished that victory at great personal sacrifice. They, rather than their white counterparts, lost their school and their sense of belonging, and when they arrived on the white-controlled campus, they were treated like enemies in a hostile land. White administrators, coaches, and teachers, who enjoyed greater authority than their black counterparts, privileged white students over blacks and blamed most interracial conflict on black students. School authorities canceled all events that would bring white and black students together in an intimate social setting, including the prom, though many blacks believed whites held their own private prom off-campus. With few exceptions, the white teachers openly expressed racist attitudes toward black students. Some white teachers segregated their classrooms with whites assigned to seats in the front and blacks in the back. A black senior, Larry McGill, recalled that the majority of the white students in every voice and in every gesture expressed hatred toward black students. Johnny Magee, a junior at the time of integration, considered his two years at Watkins' High devastating and recalled that it stunted the course of his academic life. During his years at Sandy Gavin Elementary School, Idella Washington Junior High, and Oak Park High School, he had never considered skipping a single class, but from the first day he entered Watkins High School he lost his love and thirst for learning. Soon, he and many of his friends began regularly skipping school.³⁵

³⁴ Larry McGill, interview; Larry Coleman, interview; Johnny Magee, interview; Field Director's Annual Report, Mississippi State Conference NAACP 1970, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 6, NAACP Papers; Marsh, *The Last Days*, 247.

³⁵ Larry McGill, interview; Johnny Magee, interview.

African Americans also faced rampant racism in the athletic arena. The white-controlled booster club and white parents expected white players to retain their positions. Although Coach George Blair lacked the racism that many of his white assistant coaches harbored, he placed all black players on the second string. Some black players left Laurel to live with relatives in school districts that would play their best athletes no matter their color. Others quit. Out of a love for the game, other black athletes accepted the mistreatment because they hoped that college scouts would still see them play and recruit them. Many of the white assistant coaches treated black players like idiots, and some of them even physically assaulted them. After one assistant coach assaulted McGill, he quit in protest. Many black players followed his lead. Eventually, the black assistant coach persuaded them to rejoin the team. College scouts had shown interest in McGill, and he decided that he would not allow racism to ruin his future.³⁶

Not long after the school year began, the white principal, Mr. Easterwood expelled Richard Porter, a black student, when he disagreed with a school policy and dared to argue with the principal. Porter considered the expulsion unfair and refused to leave the campus. When Porter and the principal started shouting in the middle of the campus, students in nearby classrooms moved toward the commotion. Porter demanded that Easterwood listen to his side of the story, but the principal refused and ordered him to leave the school immediately. Most of the teachers, like Gladys Austin, in observance of school rules, remained in their classrooms. But Larry Coleman, a history teacher, knew Porter and his family, and he felt compelled to intervene, particularly when he heard that someone had called the police. Coleman knew Porter as a bright and nice teenager, but he

³⁶ Larry McGill, interview; Larry Coleman, interview.

also knew he had a temper. If the police arrived and tried to arrest him, Porter would fight them. Coleman worried that the conflict could escalate into violence that would trigger a school riot and that police might shoot Porter.³⁷

Coleman hurried toward Porter, put a protective arm around his shoulders, and beseeched him to leave campus with him. Porter allowed Coleman to guide him out of the school building. They had nearly reached the bottom of the steps when six police vehicles sped into the parking lot, and 10 officers rushed toward them, aiming their pistols at Porter. Coleman stepped in front of Porter as the policemen neared and surrounded him. By that point, a large group of students had gathered around the windows that surrounded the foyer in the front of the school. They stood quietly watching, waiting—the tension palpable. Coleman begged the officers to step back and allow him to escort Porter off the school grounds. The policemen only inched closer, and Coleman shouted, “I have him . . . let him just go home.” Coleman never saw the officer who slipped out of the building behind him, but he felt Porter being ripped from his arm so hard that he nearly lost his balance. When the officer threw Porter to the ground on his face, the other officers leapt forward, one jumping on his back and another handcuffing him. Coleman begged them to stop as the arrest was unnecessary. One of the officers threatened to arrest Coleman if he did not return to his classroom. With great reluctance, Coleman turned away from Porter and reentered the school building.³⁸

At that moment, as Larry McGill recalled, a white student called a black student a “nigger” and “all hell broke loose, just that quick.” No one could remember later who hit

³⁷ Larry Coleman, interview; Gladys Austin, interview, by Patricia Boyett.

³⁸ Quoting Larry Coleman, interview. Gladys Austin, interview, by Patricia Boyett.

who first, but the violence caused racial tension to explode. Students rushed out of their classrooms to watch the ruckus and before long hundreds of whites and blacks were beating each other mercilessly. Teachers, including Coleman, tried to restore order, but it was impossible as the riot spread from the halls into the classrooms. Easterwood, whom Coleman described as “the imperial principal,” did nothing. He hid in his office while someone else called the police again. From inside his classroom located near the principal’s office, African American student Jamie Bunch froze as he heard students screaming and crying and the sounds of bodies banging into lockers. White kids started yelling that the “n[iggers] were going crazy.” Bunch’s teacher tried to keep the kids inside, but soon everyone rushed the doors. Many of them became entangled in the riot.³⁹

Another large group of black students decided to protest by staging a walk-out instead of fighting. Those black students who wanted to avoid the riot either marched in a five-mile trek to St. Paul Church where they held a protest rally or followed whites who rushed toward the parking lot to escape the mayhem. The response of the whites in the parking lot surprised McGill as it seemed pre-arranged—as if the white parents, students, police, and legal officials had secretly met prior to integration and created contingency plans in the event of a violent conflict. White parents, who had received phone calls from the school, arrived to retrieve their sons and daughters and not a few of them shouted “niggers” at the black students. The white administration had not bothered to call black parents. McGill and the other black students milled in the parking lot unsure where to go, for school officials had not provided them with an emergency plan, a leader to direct them, or employees to contact their parents and initiate the phone tree. Many of them

³⁹ First quote, Larry McGill, interview; last quote, Jamie Bunch interview; all other quotes, Larry Coleman, interview.

decided to walk home or catch a bus, but it was a long way because the campus was located in a white community, far from black neighborhoods. Even worse, as these children tried to flee, police rushed to the campus in riot gear, and dispersed the students.⁴⁰

After the riot, black churches held mass meetings, and the black community arranged conferences with the school board and the principal. Black students refused to return to Watkins High in protest of the mistreatment of black students. The following week, when they finally returned to school, white authorities had stationed armed white guards at the high school to prevent any future riots. Officers carrying riot shields and wielding shotguns walked the halls and patrolled the roof, establishing, as Johnny Magee termed it, a “police kind of state.” White administrators expelled many blacks involved in the fight, but refused to expel a single white student. In protest of the discriminatory treatment, black students staged a memorial service on the front steps of the school—a symbol of their mourning over the loss of the black students. They all wore black, but just as they knelt on the steps to pray, the principal ordered them back to class, and the police dispersed those who protested the order.⁴¹

Many black students lost all respect for Alex Warren, the black assistant principal, because he never intervened on their behalf. When Warren was principal at Oak Park High, they had feared and respected him. At Watkins, Warren lacked all power and had so few duties that students often saw him picking up trash in the halls. Magee and his friends had called Warren “the man” when he was at Oak Park. At Watkins, he became

⁴⁰ Johnny Magee, interview; Larry McGill, interview; Jamie Bunch, interview.

⁴¹ Quoting, Johnny Magee, interview. Jamie Bunch interview.

so diminished in their eyes that they condescendingly referred to him as “the janitor.” In contrast, Magee admired Gladys Austin when she finally stood up to a white girl, Cleeburgh Giles, a relative of Klansman Travis Giles who had been indicted in the Dahmer cases. Cleeburgh Giles disrespected Austin in the classroom repeatedly. Finally Austin threatened to “whup her” if she ever disrespected her or the class again, an admonishment that earned Austin hero status among black students. They also admired Coleman for risking his job in his efforts to protect Porter.⁴²

The white patriarchs wanted to fire Coleman. On the day school resumed, the principal called Coleman to his office. When Coleman arrived, he realized that he had walked into an “inquisition” as the mayor, the police chief, the assistant police chief, and the lawyer for the Laurel school board had packed into the office, and the principal had a tape-recorder on his desk. The chief of police, his “tobacco juice running out the side of his mouth,” scolded Coleman for intervening in a police conflict, and he threatened to arrest him. Coleman convinced his inquisitors to listen to his interpretation of the event. He informed them that it was imperative that he try to intervene in the conflict to lead Porter out of school because Porter would have fought the police, and the police would likely have shot him. Although he acknowledged that a riot erupted, he insisted that the riot would have paled in comparison to the melee that would have exploded had the police killed Porter. He also blamed the police for the riot as he argued that the violence only occurred after police attacked Porter. If they had allowed Coleman to finish escorting Porter off campus, they would have avoided the riot. Finally, Coleman declared, “I would be less than a man, a black man at this, if I did not come to the aid of

⁴² Johnny Magee, interview.

this black boy.” He turned to the chief and declared that he considered his efforts to protect Porter the proper response of a schoolteacher. The white men asked him to leave, and they spent hours discussing his fate. After several more meetings with the principal, the superintendent, and a board member, the principal ordered Coleman to write a letter to the superintendent defending his position and his job. Coleman complied. The school authorities eventually conceded that Coleman had made some valid points, and they allowed him to remain on the faculty.⁴³

Still, the school year remained fraught with tension. Black parents struggled to protect their children from a potential white backlash. McGill’s parents bought a vehicle for him so that he could leave school quickly if violence again erupted. Soon after the riot, McGill received a note on his vehicle, stating “we gonna kill you nigger.” As the year progressed, some of the racial tension diminished, and some whites and blacks crossed the color lines to form friendships. Watkins High began to have a winning football season, particularly as Coach Blair allowed his black students to play more often, and as Blair struggled to close the racial divides among his athletes. Some of the white athletes displayed a genuine interest in becoming “a team” and developed friendships with black teammates. Some blacks and whites even dared to cross the most forbidden lines of Jim Crow and secretly dated. These secrets came to light when several white girls gave birth to mixed racial babies that year. The development horrified many white parents who had fought desperately against school integration precisely because they feared it would lead to miscegenation, blur racial lines, and undermine white supremacy. Some enraged whites ran one black teenager, Leonard Ratcliff, out of town after it

⁴³ Quoting Larry Coleman, interview. Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett.

became known that he was the father of a white girl's child. The exposure of interracial dating terminated the racial progress that had occurred during the latter half of the year. White parents started demanding that the principal put their children in classes with white teachers and increasingly the principal complied with such requests. Over the next decade, the Laurel schools became nearly all-black, as many whites removed their children from the Laurel district and sent them to county schools, which were predominantly white.⁴⁴

The white administrators at Watkins High School and the city leaders decimated the historic opportunity to foster a healthy integrated system because they ensured integration transpired in a racist manner. The decision by white leaders to ravish Oak Park's history, to tear black students away from the nurturing atmosphere of their beloved school and throw them into the circus of white racism stunted the intellectual growth of many black students. Large numbers of black students dropped out of school and others became so angered over the mistreatment that they became apathetic in their studies. Magee remained in school and graduated, but he stopped meeting his academic potential and turned away from his dream of seeking a college degree for decades. He refused to take class pictures or attend class night, and he swore never to return to the school after graduation, a promise he kept until his own daughter attended Watkins High in the 1990s. Although many blacks who integrated Watkins High School succeeded in their academic careers, they acquired little help from white school authorities. Because white leaders permitted and even encouraged racial oppression, they nurtured racial hatred in the oppressor and the oppressed. The experience at Watkins further inculcated in Magee a

⁴⁴ Quoting, Larry McGill, interview. Johnny Magee, interview; Gladys Austin, interview by Kim Adams, May 2, 1995, MOHP Digital Archives.

deep hatred for whites for many years. The racist leadership of the white school establishment infected every aspect of integration and scarred the black students who spent their high school years in a place that seemed like the lair of the enemy.⁴⁵

In great contrast to Easterwood, Joseph Watson, the principal of Watkins Junior High School, ensured that integration transpired in as fair and cordial a manner as possible. Watson toiled so arduously to ensure that the black faculty, staff, and children were treated with respect and kindness when they entered the halls of Watkins Junior High that a black teacher, Cora Seals, noted, if you heard of his efforts, but never met him “you would not ever know what color that man was.” At the first faculty/staff meeting, Watson informed every attendee that he considered all of them professionals, and he expected all of them to act and treat each other in a professional manner. He addressed all the black teachers and white teachers alike with courtesy titles, and he treated the children equally regardless of their race. Whenever a black and white child were caught fighting, he investigated the dispute until he found out who started the skirmish and then punished that individual.⁴⁶

Regrettably, many of the white teachers were not as enlightened as Watson and though few were foolish enough to display overt racist behavior, few of them extended hands of friendship or even cordiality to their black counterparts. Seals refused to allow their rude behavior to upset her because at her mother’s side she had learned the value of the Golden Rule. So every morning when she entered the teacher’s lounge, she greeted her colleagues, even though not a single white teacher responded. Finally, one of the

⁴⁵ Johnny Magee, interview; Larry McGill, interview; Gladys Austin, interview by Patricia Boyett; Larry Coleman, interview.

⁴⁶ Cora Wade-Seals, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2009, MOHP recording.

white teachers asked her, “Why do you keep saying good morning and nobody says anything?” Seals responded politely that, as a southern woman, she was raised by her mother to greet people and treat them kindly. “Now, whether you choose to say anything is up to you.” So Seals continued to greet the white teachers, even as they ignored her.⁴⁷

When Seals confronted racist attitudes in her classrooms, rather than condemning children for repeating the ignorant views of their parents, she showed them the errors in their thinking with the hope that the evidence of racial equality would debunk the racial myths they had learned. One day, a white student insisted that her lecture on a subject was wrong and called her a liar. Seals realized that his parents had told him a black woman lacked the intelligence to teach him anything. She calmly assigned the boy some readings about the subject and informed him that if he could prove her incorrect she would apologize to him, but if he learned that her information was correct, he must apologize to her. The following morning, the boy affirmed reluctantly that her lecture was factually correct. She reminded him of their agreement. The child remained silent. Seals turned the attention on her, as she sang out “I am waiiiiiiiiting. Oh we don’t have time for this, let’s go on with that class.” Her point was driven home to the boy and the class. The child eventually became one of her best students. Seals understood that she should not punish a child for his parent’s racism. Instead, by her example, she could teach him that blacks were equal to whites.⁴⁸

According to Seals, for the most part, the black and white children adjusted quickly to integration as they were still young and naïve. Seals’ students treated her as

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

their second mother because she nurtured them as if they were her own children. Seals had shared a close relationship with her mother, a seamstress, who fled her abusive husband in the dark of night and raised Seals alone in Jackson. She passed away when Seals was in her twenties from ovarian cancer. Nothing but Seals' own child and her students seemed to fill the void she suffered with her mother's passing. Seals never tired of listening to her students' heartaches. Before long, the children called her "Mama Seals." Yet Seals was accused of prejudice against her own race because she refused to give preference to either race over the other. Seals refused to allow parents, no matter their race, to undermine her work. She remarked: "I didn't teach white children and black children. I taught children." She tried to inculcate in all her students a respect and love for learning and guided them to open their minds to see far beyond the stereotypes and the limitations of racial hatred.⁴⁹

To Seals' great joy, many of her students not only divested themselves of their racist views, but they influenced such changes in their parents. Terry Caves, son of the circuit clerk, Leonard Caves, who had blocked black suffrage until the bitter end, was part of Seals' first integrated class. Only 12-years-old at the time and small for his age, Terry was nervous about attending junior high, let alone becoming part of the first integrated class. At first, it seemed strange to him to attend school with black students. Certainly, fights erupted occasionally; however, Caves noted that tensions dissipated fairly quickly. Caves found many of the black teachers, particularly Cora Seals, and his physical education teacher, Wilson Terrell, fair and nice to him, and he remained grateful for their presence during those tempestuous times. Seals had never forgotten that Terry's

⁴⁹ Ibid.

father, Leonard Caves, had refused her the right to register until her boss had forced him to add her name to the registration book. Yet she would never hold Caves' prejudice against his son. She adored Terry because he was incredibly bright, and he had a kind disposition. During the Meet the Teachers night, Leonard Caves recognized Seals and stopped still when he approached her classroom. Seals just smiled and welcomed him inside. Seals noticed that the elder Caves had grown out of his racist attitude because when Terry's sister Tina entered the junior high, Caves requested that the principal place her in Seals' class.⁵⁰

Like Terry Cavies, Charles Marsh, who attended Gardiner Junior High, found the transition to integration much easier than he had feared. His parents had given him a choice to attend the public school or the private academy. Because of the fantastic tales his grandmother and his friends had told him about African Americans' proclivity for violence, Marsh worried that the black students might harm him. Nevertheless, he chose to attend Gardiner because when he thought back on his own experiences with blacks during the integrated youth meetings after the train derailment, he recalled black children who were kind to him. Still, on the first day of school which was a particularly humid morning, he wore his thick winter coat. When his father asked why he was wearing his coat when it was 98 degrees out, he replied that he needed the "extra padding" in the event that a black student assaulted him. Upon his arrival on campus, Marsh quietly made his way toward his locker sandwiched between two black students. One of them, a boy named Deon, made the first gesture toward friendship as he offered his hand to Marsh and introduced himself. Marsh shook his hand. Soon, Marsh realized that the black

⁵⁰ Terry Caves, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 28, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 120-121; Cora Wade-Seals, interview.

students were as afraid as he was and had more cause for their fear. Just two years earlier, the Klan had reigned over Laurel. After the first day, Marsh left his coat at home until winter came.⁵¹

Certainly, Gardner Junior High experienced some racial rifts, but Marsh found that many of the kids, white and black, found desegregation much easier than their parents. Marsh later recalled that the “sons and daughters of Klansmen and civil rights activists . . . of black militants and Citizens’ Councilors, of society matrons and union organizers” sat together in classrooms and played together on sporting fields. Some of them even became friends. Integration wiped away many racist myths, for Marsh soon learned, contrary to his grandmother’s teaching, that blacks were not inferior. He considered an African American, Jerome Johnson, the brightest student in his class because he read unabridged classics by W. E. B. DuBois and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Sports terminated the racial divide for most black and white athletes because they sweat and bled on the same teams and rejoiced and cried over the same victories and defeats; and in the process they learned that race was an abstract divide. One of the more surprising interracial friendships emerged between two black students, Unkgang Harrison and Flip Freeman, and a white student, Isaac Buckley, the son of Travis Buckley—the Klansman charged in the Dahmer murder and the Watkins’ kidnapping case. Isaac Buckley had always hated school. Too old for his class, dressed in old over-sized clothing, disfigured with a scarred face, and constantly smelling of onions, the white kids had treated him terribly for years. Integration changed his life. Black students cared little about his odd appearance, his disheveled clothing, or his strange smell. They simply liked

⁵¹ Quoting Marsh, *The Last Days*, 259; *Ibid.*, 257-272.

him, and he realized that he liked them far better than any white student.⁵² Despite or perhaps because of these friendships that developed across racial lines, most white authorities and parents in Laurel still virulently opposed integration, and they reasserted efforts to ensure that it failed.

Several decades later, the superintendent of the Laurel school district, Glenn McGee, remarked, “Brown achieved desegregation, but not integration.” Despite some of the positive changes that occurred in the Hattiesburg schools and in the Laurel junior highs, integration failed over the next decade across the Central Piney Woods because most white administrators and faculty fought all efforts by their less powerful black counterparts to incorporate black culture and to amalgamate the students. At best, whites expected blacks to assimilate. Mostly, whites continued to treat blacks as interlopers in the schools that they still perceived as belonging to them. They fostered an environment in which students attended the same schools and participated in common extracurricular activities but remained segregated socially. With the final implementation of *Brown* through the *Alexander* ruling, civil rights activists achieved an ambivalent victory for the schools indeed had desegregated, but they had not, as McGee, noted integrated. At the least, however, Movement activists would achieve better results in the integration of higher education.⁵³

During the early 1970s, many black and white students who attended the University of Southern Mississippi during a virulent era of campus unrest when students

⁵² Quoting Marsh, *The Last Days*, 260; *Ibid.*, 261-272.

⁵³ Quoting “Black Youths Pay Price of Integration,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 16, 2004. Rod Woullard interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Johnny DuPree, interview; Johnny Magee, interview; “Separate but Equal: Laurel School System the Exception to the Rule,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 15, 2004.

and professors debated academic freedom, the Vietnam War, and civil rights, overcame racial divides. Although President William McCain faced stalemates in his battles against faculty, students, and civil rights, he ultimately fought a losing war. In the 1970s, blacks continued to enroll at USM. As their numbers grew, they integrated areas initially untouched by desegregation. In 1970, Carol Jackson along with 12 other black girls moved into the dorms. Although she found the racial environment better than she had imagined, she overheard whites using the “n word.” Integration of all aspects of the school proceeded gradually.⁵⁴

The following year, a black student, Junior Harris—son of civil rights activist veteran Daisy Harris—desegregated the boys’ dorms. The morning after Harris and his roommate moved into the dorm, they found a sign on their door, “nigger go home, signed the Ku Klux Klan.” Harris and his roommate refused to capitulate. Rather, they turned the sign over and wrote “cracker go home, signed the NAACP.” Perhaps the white students admired their courage and their sense of humor, for after the incident Harris and his roommate became good friends with the signatories. Change was coming, but slowly. In 1973, the university tried to further integrate the dorms by integrating roommates. Charles Lawrence found his white roommate from Alabama kind, and they quickly became friends. When the white boy’s parents learned of his living situation, however, they demanded that the university move him. Yet every setback was accompanied by another victory. Eddie Holloway became the first black residence hall manager, and he made friends with many whites. Although the racial milieu at the university continued to improve as progressive white leadership on campus grew stronger, the society around

⁵⁴ Quoting Carol Jackson Preyor, interview. Charles Lawrence Jr., interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010, MOHP recording.

USM remained as staunchly segregated and committed to white supremacy as ever.⁵⁵

In 1970 white hostility toward blacks grew so intense over the integration of secondary education that the Central Piney Woods faced some significant setbacks in the racial struggle, most notably in the arena of racial justice. The rage over school integration particularly had a negative impact on the Dahmer cases still pending in Forrest County, and on the Watkins case on the Mississippi Coast. In the early 1970s, state and federal attorneys had planned to retry all the Dahmer cases that had resulted in mistrials; and the state planned to try those defendants who had yet to face trial. The federal and state prosecutors, however, worried that in a milieu of racial tension acquiring a racially unbiased jury might prove impossible. They also worried about the state of their star witness, Billy Roy Pitts, whose mental stability had declined during the sixties.⁵⁶

Special Agent in Charge Roy Moore informed FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that since he hoped to retry the DABURN suspects in federal court, it was necessary to keep Pitts in a “cooperative spirit and good frame of mind.” But keeping Pitts happy proved difficult. By the summer of 1969, authorities had sent Pitts to the El Tuna Federal Correctional Institution in Texas to serve out his sentence. Pitts requested that the FBI move him to another prison because the Mexican diet worsened his ulcer. He also complained about his confinement in isolation even though authorities separated him

⁵⁵ Quoting Daisy Harris Wade, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett) and Danielle McGuire, June 5, 2006, MOHP recording. Charles Lawrence Jr., interview; Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 30, 2008, MOHP recording.

⁵⁶ SAC, Jackson to Director, May 1, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4703, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers].

from prisoners for his protection since it was well-known that he was a state witness. Constantly, Pitts bemoaned his suffering, and he reminded agents that he had complied with the FBI's wishes by testifying in every trial. He had even given up his mistress, as agents suggested it would help his case in front of the parole board. In one letter, he asked why "I haft [sic] to suffer more than any one else. I have done my part and I know that God is with me because I have done this. But I am lousing [sic] the best years of my life." Pitts expected early parole. He also desired an operation to fix his jaw as his lower teeth protruded beyond his upper cavity. Desperate to keep Pitts calm, the FBI moved him to an institution closer to his parents and paid for the operation on his jaw. On the state level, Dukes and Finch pursued a pardon for Pitts.⁵⁷

Toward the end of 1970, talk of retrying the DABURN defendants dissipated. The federal orders forcing desegregation of Mississippi schools had generated intense anti-federal sentiment throughout the state and subsequently rendered it an inopportune time to pursue a federal trial. When federal attorney Robert E. Hauberg pushed to retry the seven defendants who had received mistrials in federal court, Civil Rights Department Attorney Robert A. Murphy strongly advised allowing the state to finish its cases in the Dahmer killing before the federal government tried the defendants again. Finch promised to bring Nix and DeBoxtel to trial for arson during the fall 1970 term, but he insinuated that he would let the remainder of the Dahmer cases pass to the files. Ultimately, Finch

⁵⁷ First quote, SAC Jackson to Director, July 28, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 55, #44-1512-4605; second quote, Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Lee, August 3, 1969, attached to FBI Report August 7, 1969, SAC, Jackson to Director, DABURN FBI File, vol. 55, #44-1512-4[?]; Billy Roy Pitts to Mr. Bob Lee, August 14, 1969, attached to SAC, Jackson to Director, August 26, 1969, DABURN FBI File, vol. 55, #44-1512-4628; FBI Report, March 20, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4689; FBI Report, September 11, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 57, #44-1512-4722, all in Helfrich Papers.

neglected to try any of the defendants in 1970, and by the close of 1971 the district attorney had passed to the files the remaining Dahmer cases. On the Coast, Donald Cumbest set aside the Watkins kidnapping cases. He never prosecuted Nix, Bowers, or Sessum for the crime, and he failed to re-prosecute Buckley.⁵⁸ Consequently, many of the Klansmen who had conspired with, or participated in, the murder of Dahmer, or the effort to cover it up by kidnapping Watkins, managed to evade justice in the 1970s. The Movement and federal intervention in southern Mississippi had instigated a shift in racial justice, but the white run judicial system was still not as committed to attaining justice for blacks as it was for whites.

Nevertheless, the stalwart Klansmen who remained committed to rejuvenating the organization faced external and internal obstacles. With Bowers in prison, most Klansmen considered the Klan dead. Lacking a powerful leader to enforce discipline, Klansmen fought frequently and arguments escalated into raucous brawls. The fear of renewed indictments curtailed Klan activities. Klansmen understood that state authorities could reinstate the indictments on cases passed to the files at any time they desired, and

⁵⁸ SAC, Jackson to Director, May 1, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 56, #44-1512-4703, Helfrich Papers. *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1968) case no. 49/6800, *State of Mississippi v. Travis Buckley* (1968), case nos. 159/6801, 159/6799; *State of Mississippi v. Henry DeBoxtel* (1968), case nos. 158/6796, 159/6784; *State of Mississippi v. Howard Travis Giles* (1968), case no. 159/6802; *State of Mississippi v. Franklin Lyons* (1968), case no. 156/6786; *State of Mississippi v. Franklin Lyons* (1968), case no. 157/6791; *State of Mississippi v. Deavours Nix* (1968), case no. 159/6801; *State of Mississippi v. Charles Noble*, case no.(1968), 156/6785; *State of Mississippi v. Cecil Sessum* (1968), case no.158/6796; *State of Mississippi v. William Thomas Smith* (1968), case no.158/6797; *State of Mississippi v. Lester Thornton* (1968), case nos. 15/6787 and 158/6792; *State of Mississippi v. Charles Clifford Wilson* (1968), case no. 157/6788; *State of Mississippi v. Charles Clifford Wilson* (1968), case no. 158/6795, all in *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 161-167, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; "DA Passes Four Cases to Files," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 24, 1969.

the Department of Justice still hoped to re-try many of the DABURN defendants. A Klan source informed the FBI on January 21, 1971 that the Klan was finished because everyone was in the “pen.”⁵⁹

Nonetheless, both Klan informants and Klan convicts ultimately endured the defeat of the Invisible Empire fairly well. The federal and state authorities rewarded their main Klan informants in the DABURN case in the early seventies. On September 3, 1971, Pitts received parole from La Tuna Prison. Soon after his parole, Governor Williams promised Pitts that as long as he never returned to Mississippi, the state would never incarcerate him for his state sentence in the Dahmer case. Byrd also fared well considering that he had reneged on his promises to the FBI to testify against his Klan brothers. In September 1970, Governor Williams commuted Byrd’s sentence from 10 to five years, making him eligible for parole in two years. After Governor Williams spoke to the Forrest County judge and district attorneys in Byrd’s favor, they did not oppose Byrd’s parole. Local officials sent a letter supporting Byrd’s release to the parole board signed by most of the public officials in Jones County, including the five county supervisors. The board paroled Byrd after he had served less than two years in jail.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Quoting FBI Report, January 27, 1971, Deavours Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-583; Greta Jean Morgan to SAC, Jackson, June 26, 1970, Sam Bowers FBI File, vol. 9, #157-18-1351; FBI Report, June 23, 1971, Charles Lamar Lowe FBI File, vol. 2, #157-4387-129; Bernard C. Lang, to SAC, Jackson, February 29, 1972, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-614; FBI Report, December 21, 1970, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-581; FBI Report, December 28, 1970, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-582, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁶⁰ “Jones Countians, Requested Byrd’s Parole,” *Jackson Daily News*, October 8, 1970, DABURN FBI File, vol. 57, #44-1512-4733. SAC, Jackson to Director, DABURN FBI File, vol. 57, #44-1512-4778; J. L. Martin to SAC, Jackson, September 30, 1971, DABURN FBI File, vol. 57, #44-1512-4785; W. F. Minor, “Dahmer Case Figure Freed,”

In the early 1970s, Bowers, Sessum, Smith, and Wilson remained in prison, but they suffered less than most inmates. Sessum enjoyed a decent livelihood for a prisoner as he made billfolds, belts, and various leather goods, which Deavours Nix sold in his restaurant. Sessum and Wilson received several emergency leaves during their prison sentences. Authorities granted Sessum a two-week leave to visit his ill father at Christmas; yet, he spent most of the time with his Klan buddies. In March 1971, Parchman released Sessum for 10 days to attend his father's funeral. Six days after Wilson arrived at Parchman, authorities assigned him to work in the hospital, and by April 6, 1970, he had become a trusty. Wilson began receiving emergency leaves under Governor Williams. The governor justified the leaves because Wilson's son had undergone surgery and his wife fell ill, which prevented her from running the family business—the Laurel Brace and Limb Company. Although the federal government never permitted Bowers any leave, he spent his prison time completing a college degree in theology from Pacific Lutheran University. Joseph Palmquist, who supervised education at the McNeil Penitentiary, described Bowers as a “marvelous inmate,” and the chairman of the university's religious department, Reverend Kenneth Christopherson, lauded Bowers as his best student and an excellent writer in the style of the Nineteenth Century English historians.⁶¹

Laurel Leader-Call, October 7, 1970, attached to Lawrence Byrd FBI File, vol. 2, #157-505-270, all in Helfrich Papers.

⁶¹ Quoting “Ex-KKK Leader Bowers Gets Religion Degree in Prison,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 1975, Bowers FBI File, vol. 9, #157-18-1377; FBI Report, February 27, 1970, Cecil Sessum FBI File, vol. 4, #157-854-409; FBI Report, January 27, 1971, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-583; FBI Report, April 12, 1971, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-590; Robert T. Agnew to SAC, Jackson, DABURN FBI File, vol. 57,

Klansmen certainly understood that they had no influence over the federal government and lacked the power to free Bowers; yet, they still enjoyed some influential relationship with Mississippi authorities, which they exploited to help Sessum, Smith, and Wilson. Soon after the state sent Sessum and Wilson to prison, Klansmen began fighting for their release. Nix distributed petitions demanding the suspension of Wilson's sentence and kept three petitions on the counter by his restaurant cash register. He also lobbied officials to work for Sessum's release. During the summer of 1971, Nix and Henry DeBoxtel campaigned for Jimmy Swan for governor because Swan had promised to pardon Sessum. Wilson, Sessum, and Smith received a weekend pass in the late summer 1971 before the primary elections. Nix transported the three men from the prison to Laurel in his private plane. They spent their time campaigning for white supremacist candidates. To frighten whites to vote for white supremacist candidates, they distributed flyers featuring a black woman driving black people in a sheriff's car to the polls.⁶²

Change certainly occurred on the political front that year, though not in the way the Klan had envisioned. Jimmy Swan invoked racial demagoguery in his speeches, but less so than he had in his 1967 campaign. Neither of the chief gubernatorial candidates, William Waller and Charles Sullivan, campaigned on racist platforms. Moreover, as the black vote proved powerful enough to swing the election in a close race, many candidates openly appealed to African Americans. Certainly, covert racism continued to influence

#44-1512-4270, all in Helfrich Papers. Governor Announces Policy on Emergency Leave, June 16, 1972, RG 27, MDAH.

⁶² FBI Report, December 21, 1970, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-581; FBI Report, August 8, 1971, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-597; FBI Report, August 23, 1971, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-598; FBI Report, September 29, 1971, Nix FBI File, vol. 6, #157-3484-600, all in Helfrich Papers.

white politics, but the days of open racial demagoguery had passed. The campaign rhetoric expressed a desire among candidates to lead Mississippi into a more harmonious relationship with the rest of the nation so that it might grow economically. The moderate tenor of the campaign surprised many people in the wake of massive school integration.⁶³

When Waller won the gubernatorial race, his inauguration speech became the first inaugural address by a governor since the *Brown* decision not to possess a single word about fighting the federal government or sustaining segregation. Rather than attacking non-Mississippians and their alien ideas, he argued that for the state to grow it must attract outsiders. Waller called on citizens “to renounce in clear and unmistakable terms the use of violence to settle differences among people.” Envisioning a prosperous future for Mississippi, he implored the citizens to accept reality rather than coddling the “foolish fantasy” of bygone days. Mississippi, he promised, could achieve “greatness based on a faith in the ultimate goodness and dignity of our fellowmen rather than in suspicion and exploitation of them.”⁶⁴

As governor, Waller implemented some progressive racial policies and promoted programs like the Office of Minority Business; it made 55 loans valued at \$1,964,028, which helped open 13 new businesses and developed current businesses by awarding 110 new contracts in its first year. Waller also promoted greater diversity in hiring,

⁶³ “Miss. Citizens Ballot Tuesday,” *The Times Picayune*, August 1, 1971, Evelyn Gandy Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]; “Neshoba Fair Closes Tonight; Three More Candidates Heard,” *Meridian Star*, June 30, 1971; Bill Waller Announcement for Governor, Press Release, May 25, 1971, HMR; Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi After 1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 1990), 200-201.

⁶⁴ Quoting Governor William Waller, speech, January 17, 1972, *Mississippi Senate Journal*, 1972, 60, McCain, USM; *Ibid.*, 58-59.

particularly in Parchman prison, which raised its percentage of black employees from 13 to 42 percent in the security force. Moreover, the prison system placed blacks in all levels of power, with African Americans serving as majors, lieutenants, and sergeants.

According to a Howard University study, the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman ranked first among state penitentiaries in the hiring of black workers. Waller also oversaw the State Democratic Committee's adoption of the state's Affirmative Action Plan via a resolution to seek greater inclusion of minorities, women, and youth in the Democratic Party.⁶⁵

Regrettably Waller greatly stained his work toward racial reconciliation with his empathetic action that favored Klansmen imprisoned for the Dahmer murder. He continued Governor Williams's practice of providing imprisoned Klansman, including his former client, Clifford Wilson, with prison leaves. Between March 12, 1969 and April 30, 1972, Wilson received 10 emergency releases for a total of 228 days. Many national and state newspapers and organizations condemned Governor Waller's actions. *Newsweek* reported that the many furloughs allowed Wilson to spend more time out of prison than the FBI spent in trying to incarcerate him. Editors of the *Delta Democrat Time* noted that Governor Waller "is reminding us of an old truth: Justice for the rich is not the same as justice for the poor; justice for the white is not the same as justice for the black; justice for those who have friends in power is not the same as justice for those who don't." They lambasted Waller's claims that the public supported these leaves by declaring that the governor would find a different polling result if he sought the opinion

⁶⁵ "Annual Report: State of Mississippi Office of Minority Business Enterprise," prepared by Thomas H. Espy; "Mississippi State Penitentiary: The Superintendent and His Staff Welcome Governor William L. Waller," December 10, 1975; Affirmative Action Plan Mississippi State Democratic Party, n. d., all in RG 27, MDAH.

of the Dahmers and their friends. Wilson received his last 90-day leave on April 30, 1972, but he did not return to prison long. Waller and the Mississippi Legislature developed a work-release program which allowed prisoners to live in a custodial situation outside of Parchman while they completed their sentences. By November 28, 1972, Governor Waller had placed Wilson in the program, nearly nine months before the bill for the program passed the legislature and the program became fully operational. Parchman sent Wilson to South Mississippi State Hospital in Laurel, where he worked making braces for patients and stayed each night. He also enjoyed visits with his family.⁶⁶

Outraged, Ellie Dahmer declared that while Wilson's family enjoyed his presence, "all we have right now is a tombstone and a grave." When Mississippi's black leaders characterized Waller's actions as an "abuse of executive power," Waller denied accusations that he had released Wilson to fulfill campaign promises. The governor defended his program and the inclusion of Wilson on the grounds that Parchman reports characterized Wilson as "well-balanced, without psychosis, even-tempered, timid and non-violent." He claimed that he had consulted the FBI before approving Wilson's work release. Finally, he pointed out that eight of the 15 inmates in the program were black and that many of the participants were serving life sentences for murder. Waller's speeches failed to placate the black public. Aaron Henry, President of the Mississippi NAACP,

⁶⁶ Quoting "Perverted Justice" *The Delta Democrat-Time*, July 30, 1972. Governor Announces Policy on Emergency Leave, June 16, 1972; Emergency Leaves, Charles Clifford Wilson, Parchman Records; "Mississippi: The Lifer," *Newsweek*, n. d., \ 20; Parchman Work-Release Program, Announcement from Governor Waller's Office, November 28, 1972; "Mississippi State Penitentiary: The Superintendent and his Staff Welcome William L. Waller," press release, December 10, 1975, all in RG 27, MDAH. "Wilson Now at Hospital," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 30, 1972.

argued that Waller's actions "should be repudiated in the name of peace, justice and humanity." The regional and Mississippi NAACP leaders along with the leaders of the Jones and Forrest County branches of the NAACP all released public statements condemning the inclusion of Wilson in the program. Forrest County President of the NAACP Clarence Magee encouraged local blacks to arm themselves against the former Klansman.⁶⁷

Blacks did not stand alone in their criticism. Some of the most virulent denunciations originated from whites. The editors of the *Hattiesburg American*, which by 1972 had begun divesting the newspaper of its ties to white supremacy, declared that the Dahmer murder would remain "an all-time mark of infamy in the affairs of this state." The editors also noted, that although the Klansmen who committed the murder hailed from another county, their crime defamed Forrest County as well. The diligent investigation and prosecution and the willingness of local juries to convict reflected a shift among the citizenry that laid the foundations for a more just society. Although the editors asserted that they believed in the deliverance of mercy, they disagreed with its application in such a watershed case, noting that the prosecutors, judges and jury had acted with great bravery to bring justice in Wilson's case, and his inclusion in the work release program besmirched their efforts. Local and national religious leaders also

⁶⁷ First quote, "Mississippi: The Lifer," *Newsweek*, n. d., 20, RG 27, MDAH; second and third quotes, Joseph Bonney, "Waller Defends Placement of Wilson on Work Program," *The Clarion-Ledger*, November 30, 1972; fourth quote, "Henry Takes Issue with Gov. Waller," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 14, 1972, all in DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-4809, Helfrich Papers. "Wilson at Ellisville," *Laurel-Leader Call*, November 29, 1972; Dick Tarbutton, "Waller Defends his Release of Wilson," *Hattiesburg American*, December 7, 1972. Southeast Region NAACP Annual Report 1972, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 17; 1972 Annual Report of Laurel NAACP Branch Activities, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, both in NAACP Papers. FBI Report, December 6, 1972, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-4808, Helfrich Papers.

condemned Waller. The Laurel Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance informed Waller that his actions would cause a regression in racial relations. George Mitchel of B'nai B'rith pressured Governor Waller to rescind the order.⁶⁸

The white establishment in Mississippi and the federal government ignored the pleas and continued to counteract the legal victories against the Klansmen over the remainder of the decade. In April 1973, Assistant Attorney General Bob Murphey moved to dismiss all federal charges against defendants in the Dahmer case. Because the witnesses had testified in many trials that failed to produce convictions, Murphey considered another federal trial futile. Judge Harold Cox granted the motion and ordered the charges dismissed. On August 19, the FBI concluded the DABURN investigation, returned all evidence to the owners, and closed the case. The three remaining Klansmen behind bars in the DABURN murder did not stay in prison long. Smith and Sessum were paroled in January 1978; both men served less than 10 years of their life sentences. Wilson spent most of his jail time on the work release program until January 1976 when Governor Waller commuted his life sentence to time served and released him. Two months later, federal authorities released Sam Bowers, and he returned to Jones County. Within a decade of their convictions, these four murderers along with Byrd and the 13 others never convicted in the Dahmer case roamed free in Jones County. Black life was

⁶⁸ Quoting "Release in the Dahmer Case," *Hattiesburg American*, December 6, 1972, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-480[?], Helfrich Papers; "Alliance Has Sent Protest," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 17, 1973, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-481[?]; SAC Elmer F. Linberg FBI Memo, June 26, 1972, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-4793, all in Helfrich Papers.

still expendable in Mississippi.⁶⁹

Moreover, at least one Klansman got away with murder in the mid-1970s. On June 4, 1974, two young African American army reservists, David Windham and Carl Richardson, stopped by the Amusement Center in their hometown of Laurel owned by a 51-year-old Klansman, Maurice Flowers. The Klansman grew irritated when Windham and Richardson engaged in a boisterous game of pool, and he ordered them to leave his establishment. Windham refused. After a heated exchange, Flowers stalked out of the poolroom and toward his grocery store across the street. Windham, with Richardson in tow, followed Flowers into the street, and called him a “motherfucker.” Flowers returned the insult and then stormed into his store as Windham shouted curses after him. When Flowers strode back out of his store, Windham stood his ground in the middle of the street and engaged in a fiery cursing match with the Klansman until Flowers pulled a pistol out of his back pocket and pulled the trigger. Windham clutched his chest, took several steps, and fell to the ground. Terrified, Richardson fled.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ SAC, Jackson to Acting Director, April 14, 1973, DABURN FBI File, vol. 59, #44-1512-4816 and #44-1512-4817, Helfrich Papers; “Judge Dismisses Federal Charges,” *Laurel Leader Call*, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-4818; SAC, Jackson to Director, August 19, 1974, DABURN FBI File, vol. 58, #44-1512-4841, all in Helfrich Papers. Nikki Davis Maute, “Stories Conflict on Number of Firebombing Participants,” *Hattiesburg American*, n. d., Vernon F. Dahmer Collection, McCain, USM; “Federal Charges in Dahmer Case Dropped,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 11, 1972; “Black Man Drives Ex-Wizard To Freedom,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, Bowers File #157-18-1382, vol. 9, Helfrich Papers.

⁷⁰ Quoting Carl Maurice Richardson, statement, June 4, 1974, Maurice Flowers case file, *State of Mississippi v. Maurice Flowers* (1974), case no. 4620, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Flowers* (1974)]; “Flowers Faces Murder Charges,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 1974; “Flowers Trial Gets Underway,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 20, 1974. For Maurice Flowers’ membership in the Klan, see Stephen W. Callender, to SAC, New Orleans, White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, March 24, 1964, Bowers FBI File, vol. 1, #157-18-5, Helfrich Papers.

Word of the shooting spread across the black community quickly, and by the time police arrived on the scene, a large crowd of African Americans had gathered around the store. Efforts to save Windham's life proved futile. He was dead before the ambulance reached the hospital. The black community erupted in rage. Flowers, a known Klansman in Jones County, had killed several black men over the years with impunity. Although police arrested Flowers on murder charges, by 1974 many young blacks in Laurel believed in responding to violence with violence. That night, groups of young African Americans burned Flowers' vehicle and shattered the picture window of Flowers' storefront. When policemen arrived on the scene to investigate, several blacks shot at the officers, and wounded one of them. Officers returned fire. They wounded two people and arrested six persons, but they failed to contain the black rage and violence that spread across Laurel over the next four nights. Generally, black rioters targeted white businesses in black communities. They shot out windows, vandalized and set fire to buildings, and hurled rocks at whites who dared to enter their community. They also repeatedly attacked Flowers' store. One group burglarized the store and then firebombed it, but the fire department managed to save most of the building. In response, several young whites rioted and attacked black-owned stores. The rioting continued, even after policemen arrested a dozen blacks and whites. Chief Herman Aycock and Mayor Bill Patrick appealed to black leaders for help. Although black leader Reverend Allen Johnson condemned the rioting, he pointed out that the violence had erupted because of the grief and anger over Windham's murder. Johnson understood the young rioters. He had suffered a Klan attack less than four years earlier when the White Knights bombed his home. Eventually, Johnson and other black leaders managed to convince black rioters to

stand down and place their faith in the justice system.⁷¹

Blacks were hopeful when a grand jury indicted Flowers on first degree murder charges. Initially, Jones County authorities held Flowers in jail without bond, but when he fell ill with cancer, authorities released him. When the case came to trial in late November, Flowers was the only defense witness. He testified that Windham followed him into the store and threatened to harm him, so he shot him out of fear for his life. Several of the prosecution's eye-witnesses, including Richardson, testified that Windham had not followed Flowers into the store; neither did he physically threaten him. Rather, he was standing still in the street with no weapon in his hand when Flowers shot him in the chest. During deliberations, the all-white jury engaged in such a heated exchange that people in the courtroom could hear them shouting. After five and a half hours, the jury reported to Judge James D. Hester that it was deadlocked 11 to 1 which forced the judge to declare a mistrial. During Flower's retrial in May 1975, many Laurel blacks, including Johnny Magee, marched from the scene of the murder to the courthouse in support of the prosecution. Inside the courtroom, the old Klansman again claimed that he had killed Windham in self-defense. After nearly four hours of deliberation, the jury acquitted him. Despite the Movement victories and the FBI war against the Klan, a Jones County jury still failed to convict a Klansmen who wantonly murdered a black man.⁷²

⁷¹ "Few Incidents," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 7, 1974; "Flowers Faces Murder Charges," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 1974; "Disturbance Continues," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 6, 1974; "More Violence at Laurel," *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 1974; "More Laurel Violence," *Hattiesburg American*, June 7, 1974.

⁷² *State of Mississippi v. Flowers* (1974), *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 6, 208, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi; *Mississippi v. Flowers* (1974), Flowers case file; "Flowers Trial Gets Underway," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 20, 1974; "Flowers Jury Is Still Out," *Laurel Leader-Call*,

Blatant police brutality and white refusal to punish rogue officers also reflected the low value many whites placed on black life in the Central Piney Woods. In Forrest County in the fall 1969, a black Vietnam War veteran, Dennis Lee Watson, contacted police for help when he had trouble starting his vehicle. Officer Michael Shoemake approached him, ordered him out of the vehicle, and arrested him for public drunkenness. Watson informed the officer that he had returned from the Vietnam War 20 days previous, and he had consumed two beers. He was not intoxicated. Refusing to listen to his story, Shoemake transported Watson downtown and booked him in jail. The arrest of the black veteran failed to satiate him. Shoemake and another officer beat Watson in his cell. They struck him several times with a hard object, which left a large wound on his shoulder and a lump on the left side of his face. The beating also triggered Watson's painful recurring back injury. Watson delivered a formal complaint to the city and noted that he served his nation in the Vietnam War only to return home to suffer mistreatment at the hands of racist police. Shoemake denied striking Watson. Rather, Shoemake claimed that Watson tried to assault an officer at the police station which forced police to subdue him. Sergeant James Owen corroborated Shoemake's story. Of course, activists had long complained that Owen was one of the worst abusers of blacks.⁷³

About the same time as Watson's case, police officers beat another African American, Johnny Young, while arresting him. When the black community responded with rage, Chief Hugh Herring claimed that Young had threatened the officer with a

November 21, 1974; "Jury Deadlock Causes Mistrial," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 22, 1974; "Jury Selection Underway," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 19, 1975; "Flowers Trial Goes to Jury," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 20, 1975; "Flowers Wins," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 21, 1975; Johnny Magee, interview.

⁷³ Dennis Lee Watson, statement, November 5, 1969; Roe Michael Shoemake and James Owen, statements, November 5, 1969, both in HMR.

butcher knife and the officer had lawfully defended himself by hitting Young over the head with a revolver. The black community considered the chief's statement a cover-up of brutality. On October 24, Reverend J. C. Killingsworth and Richard Stallsworth led 250 black students to city hall and to the Forrest County Courthouse and launched the first in a series of public demonstrations protesting police brutality that year. Regrettably, after the protest, several of the young black participants robbed the demonstration of its high moral ground when they vented their rage through criminal acts. Thirty of them entered McCaffrey's Food Store No. 5 and stole food and beer, while another group of black teenagers hurled bricks at automobiles.⁷⁴

The Black Coalition—a newly formed local group composed of members of the local NAACP, and other civil rights groups that still had a slight presence in the Central Piney Woods including, SCLC, MFDP, and FCAC—organized the black community's rage into a nonviolent campaign against racial injustice in law enforcement. For over a decade, blacks in Hattiesburg had publicly condemned police brutality, and since 1967 they had fought for the dismissal of Herring and several abusive officers. In 1969 they tried once again to terminate police brutality. The leaders issued a formal statement accusing Hattiesburg police of engaging in abusive, racist, and discriminatory conduct toward black citizens and demanded the resignation of Chief Herring. In addition, the Black Coalition demanded that the Forrest County Sheriff hire full-time black deputies and fire racist whites from his department. The coalition warned that "this problem is of monumental proportions and should be dealt with now before we are confronted with another 'Cloudies Shinall case.' Act now while we are still talking!" When the city

⁷⁴ "Demonstrators March Again," *Hattiesburg American*, October 25, 1969; "Demand New Police Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, October 24, 1969.

leaders ignored their warning, the coalition threatened that if Chief Herring did not resign by November 25, 1969, blacks would implement Black Christmas—a black boycott of merchants during Christmas season. Black leaders reasoned that blacks should not pay the salary of the chief, via sales tax, when he allowed his officers to “beat our heads.” They also requested that parents take their children out of school on November 7 and bring them to a community march against injustice.⁷⁵

Throughout the next several weeks, blacks staged a variety of protests. Black Coalition leaders considered Chief Herring’s resignation the most important demand. They distributed a leaflet around the black community that denigrated Herring as a disease that needed to be exorcised: “the head is sick, therefore the whole body is afflicted with the disease of racism. For the sake of the well-being of this community, let us get rid of this sickness now.” During these protests, blacks also remembered the black martyrs who had fallen in the struggle for civil rights. After the march on November 7, black leaders held a memorial service dedicated to Medgar Evers and Vernon Dahmer at the New Ebenezer Baptist Church.⁷⁶

The white city fathers and the white community responded to the black protests by supporting Herring. On November 11, Mayor Grady and the commissioners issued a public statement that condemned the coalition as “professional agitators who make their living trying to create boycotts, strife, and advocate destruction or violence in the streets.”

⁷⁵ First quote, Statement from the Black Community, October 20, 1969; second quote, Statements from “The Black Coalition,” n. d., both in HMR. “Demand New Police Chief,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 24, 1969; “Negroes Make Statement in Response to City Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 21, 1969.

⁷⁶ Quoting Black Coalition, untitled document, HMR. “Negroes Stage Another March,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 7, 1969; The Black Coalition Objectives, n. d., HMR.

They promised to ensure the preservation of law and order with all necessary force, and they asked the citizens to support the city and Herring. Chief Herring tried to quash the protest by bringing in white men from Jones and Covington counties to stalk black protesters. The chief also ensured that the local hardware stores supplied guns to these secretly deputized men.⁷⁷

The white community in Hattiesburg also mobilized to protect Herring and stifle the protest, most blatantly by forming the Forrest County Committee to Support Your Local Police. The committee published an “Open Letter to the Citizens of Forrest County” in the *Hattiesburg American* that criticized the boycott as a communist ploy designed to instigate racial unrest, and it employed tired red-baiting tactics to decry that for nearly half of a century, communists—such as these agitators—had used boycotts, protests, and false allegations of police misconduct to foment unrest and divisiveness. To bolster their argument, the writers cited an article in “Police Times” which contended that J. Edgar Hoover had stood before the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and testified that communist nations had supported “black extremists” and used the Movement to acquire power by instigating racial violence. To quash such a development in Hattiesburg, the committee implored citizens to support and defend their police and expose the black instigators as frauds.⁷⁸

The leaders of the Black Coalition battled the white propaganda. President of the Forrest County NAACP, Dr. C. E. Smith, asserted that the coalition had presented a

⁷⁷ “Says Agitators are not Going to Run Hattiesburg,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 19, 1969; “Negroes Make Statement in Response to City Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 21, 1969.

⁷⁸ “Open Letter to the Citizens of Forrest County,” n. d., HMR.

wealth of evidence via affidavits and witness testimony to the mayor showing that the police department had still failed to integrate its department; it permitted officers to brutalize black citizens; and it implemented discriminatory procedures within the department such as preventing black police from arresting white suspects. Smith also lambasted the latest attempts to red-bait the Movement. He declared that the coalition lacked “professional agitators” and that the only outsiders involved in the racial clash were “those mysterious white men wearing dark glasses, driving cars with mostly Jones County license plates” who harassed and intimidated black citizens. Smith warned that the black protest would continue until the city removed the chief. On November 25, when the city leaders agreed to meet with the black community and negotiate demands, the coalition postponed the boycott. Then the leaders abruptly canceled Black Christmas when merchants hired more blacks, even though Herring had not resigned.⁷⁹

Problems with police brutality persisted in Hattiesburg. In March 1971, several blacks observed five policemen, including Officer Shoemake, rush into their neighborhood and point a gun at John Albert White, a 40-year-old African American. When they ordered him to halt, White, who held a small radio in his hands, stopped and raised his hands above his head. Officers ordered White to back into an alley behind a house. White complied, and he and several policemen disappeared behind the house. Seconds later shots echoed through the alleyway. Someone called an ambulance, but according to black witnesses, when the emergency responders arrived, police refused to

⁷⁹ Quoting “Negroes Make Statement in Response to City Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 21, 1969; “Negroes Vote to Postpone Economic Boycott Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 26, 1969. James Nix, interview, by Sarah Rowe, March 7, 1993, MOHP Digital; J. C. Fairley, Mamie Philips, and Charles Philips, interview by Charles Bolton, June 24, 1998, MOHP Digital.

allow them to attend to White, who was dying. Instead, police ordered them to attend to White's mother who had fainted when she learned of the shooting. Meanwhile, police officers searched White's home. White died in the alleyway, and police later claimed that White, whom they were trying to arrest on charges of marijuana possession, had pointed a gun at them and threatened to kill them. The local NAACP suspected foul play and demanded a full investigation. NAACP officials also opened their own investigation. They found an African American eye-witness who claimed that Smith held a radio, not a gun in his hands, which were raised above his head when the officer shot him. Police claimed that they retrieved a gun from Smith, but J. C. Fairley surmised that they found Smith's gun when they searched his house and planted it on his dead body.⁸⁰

Soon after the killing, Officer Shoemake received threatening phone calls from a woman who asked him: "How would you like .38 lead in your chest?" On another occasion a man called the house and warned: "Hey, Pig, we are going to get you, Boy." At 3:00 a.m., Shoemake woke to the sounds of gunshots and shattering glass. Seconds later, a drive-by shooter sprayed another round of bullets that ripped through three walls. None of the bullets hit their mark. To address the controversy and prevent more violence, the city fathers requested that the FBI investigate the shooting of White. They also released a statement asserting that the coroner's jury, composed of three blacks and three whites, had unanimously found that Shoemake had fired his gun at White in self-defense, but they decided to ask for an FBI probe because of the many rumors regarding the police department. Finally, they condemned the spineless actions of the person who had shot

⁸⁰ "NAACP Asks Investigation in Shooting," *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 1971; J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, January 31, February 4, 1977, vol. 375, 49, MOHP; "Buckshot Fired Into Home of Patrolman," Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, SCR #99-128-0-39-1-1-1, MDAH.

into Shoemake's home and informed the citizens of all races that they would ensure the preservation of law and order. The FBI investigation of White's homicide foundered, and no one was arrested in connection with the drive-by shooting on Shoemake's home. The NAACP, however, won a minor victory when Mayor Grady bowed to pressure by several black leaders and suspended Shoemake. Still, Herring remained chief and discrimination persisted in the Hattiesburg Police Department. Once again racial battles ended in a stalemate.⁸¹ The protest against police brutality was the last major direct-action demonstration in Hattiesburg during a 15-year period. Racial oppression persisted long afterward, but the black struggle moved off the streets as the racial war came to a close, and blacks shifted their focus to winning the peace in courtrooms and political halls.

Blacks had achieved many monumental victories in the racial war that plagued the Central Piney Woods since the 1964 Freedom Days campaigns. Indeed, they had achieved the primary goals of the Movement—black suffrage and desegregation. They had even acquired many tools to achieve the economic and educational goals of the Black Power struggle, including the development of Head Start, anti-poverty programs, Medicare, Medicaid, and food stamps. Despite these victories, white supremacy maintained a stronghold over Forrest and Jones counties, most blatantly in the persistence of racial injustice, economic inequity, and political power. The FBI had destroyed the Klan but had failed to terminate police brutality. Desegregation and War on Poverty programs opened opportunities for advancement, but economic and educational

⁸¹ Quoting "Buckshot Fired into Home of Patrolman," n. d., newspaper clipping, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Report, SCR #99-128-0-39-1-1-1, MDAH. "City Asks FBI to Probe Shooting of Albert White," *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1971; J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, 50, MOHP.

discrimination persisted. Blacks acquired the vote, but whites dominated the political arena.⁸²

Finally, no matter how many legal weapons blacks acquired to fight for inclusion, they could not force a change in the heart of white Mississippians. Moderate whites accepted the changes, and progressive whites more openly encouraged them. Still, many radical whites sustained hatred toward blacks, and conservatives still considered the black race inferior. As blacks entered once white-only public spaces in restaurants, schools, and theaters, many whites retreated to private schools and private clubs. Social, cultural, and religious institutions remained separate. Blacks fully integrated chain restaurants, but they tended to avoid locally-owned coffee shops and cafes where they were clearly unwanted. Churches maintained segregation. Although the local county fair officially integrated, blacks still attended on Tuesday nights, which whites popularly referred to as “nigger nights.” Whites generally refused to change their customs of racial denigration. Many whites continued to refer to Martin Luther King, Jr. as “Martin Luther Koon” and used the term “nigger” or “nigra” to refer to African Americans. Blacks who worked in white homes often still faced the humiliations of Jim Crow rituals. Their white bosses demanded that they enter their homes through the back door and eat their lunch on the back porch. They often had to relieve themselves outdoors, rather than in their employers’ bathrooms.⁸³ The white supremacist heart remained hardened.

Civil rights leaders worried not only about the persistent struggles with massive

⁸² Address by Reverend Emmett C. Burns, NAACP Youth Night Program, 27th Annual Session, Mississippi State Conference, Turner Chapel AME Church, November 2, 1972, Pt. 29, Ser. A, Reel 6, NAACP Papers, [hereinafter cited as Burns, Youth Night Program Address].

⁸³ Marsh, *The Last Days*, 240-243.

resistance, but they feared that the black youth lacked the motivation to continue the long battles ahead. Speaking at the Youth Night Program on November 3, 1972, NAACP Mississippi Field Director Reverend Emmet C. Burns called the generation of blacks who had come of age in 1964 “our finest generation,” for they had become the beneficiaries of all the successes their parents’ generation had fought for, died for, and ultimately realized. The youth had the greatest opportunities ever provided American blacks, and yet he feared they would fail to take advantage of them. Although Burns complimented the race pride that black youths invested in wearing Afros and dashikis, he expressed concern that they would become focused on the fashion of black power instead of assuming real power by becoming doctors, lawyers, company owners, and politicians. He also worried that they would refuse to return the fruits of their labor to the community and neglect to help those in need. By late 1972, the Movement enthusiasm had begun to fade into the background. Many NAACP branches folded as membership dwindled. Still, Burns expressed hope that if black communities merged the wisdom and organizational skills of veteran activists with the passion of the youth, they could achieve greater successes than ever before.⁸⁴

In the Central Piney Woods, the NAACP in Forrest and Jones Counties survived, but their work slowed as the leaders and members assessed problems and searched for new ways of resolving racial discrimination. Chairman of Education for the Laurel NAACP branch reported that the elementary schools remained segregated in Laurel at the end of 1972, but little action to rectify the situation was taken at the time. The Forrest County NAACP President Clarence Magee demanded that the city renovate the Palmers

⁸⁴ Burns, Youth Night Program Address; Field Director’s Annual Report, Mississippi State Conference NAACP 1972, Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 6, NAACP Papers.

Crossing sewage system, which he called “sub primitive at best.” The system lacked drainage, which led to overflow from cesspools into people’s yards and businesses. Yet despite Magee’s efforts, most blacks had grown tired of protest, and he could not inspire mass support for a boycott or a demonstration. The stalemates of the late sixties and early seventies forced the NAACP to retreat from the battlefield and reassess its goals, methods, strategies, and tactics and to determine a new path for the future. It proved a time of thinking more than acting as activists prepared to enter a new phase of black life.⁸⁵

By the mid-seventies, the racial war concluded in the Central Piney Woods without an unconditional surrender, a treaty, or racial reconciliation. As the bloody racial battles faded from the landscape, no single group emerged unconditionally victorious, though some achieved greater triumphs and others suffered significant defeats. The Klan experienced the most definitive vanquishing and faded into the fringes. The Movement’s capricious ally, the federal government, began its retreat from the Central Piney Woods battlefield, as the violence dissipated and the FBI closed the DABURN case, though it returned sporadically to force white compliance with civil rights laws. The destruction of the Klan certainly provided an opportunity for black activism to flourish as people could join the Movement with much less fear of violence. Yet as white men wearing robes and pointy hats surrendered the battle for control of massive resistance to white men with suits and badges, blacks realized the fight to reconstruct the Central Piney Woods had in many ways just begun. These white supremacists proved much more difficult to expose,

⁸⁵ Quoting Clarence Magee to Leslie Newcomb, November 15, 1972; 1972 Annual Report of Laurel NAACP Branch Activities, both in Pt. 29, Ser. B, Reel 9, NAACP Papers.

as their actions were easily hidden. By the mid-seventies, the Central Piney Woods had reached a stalemate. Nevertheless, Mississippi could never return to the days of Jim Crow and state sanctioned lynchings. The state had suffered years of warfare, and the white Leviathan had crumbled. In the aftermath, the citizens of both races found themselves at an ambivalent and uneasy peace as both sides assessed their gains and losses and mourned the fallen. For the next several decades, each side struggled to win the peace in the war-ravaged landscape as they sought to rebuild their society. Their divergent visions of a new Mississippi clashed. At the dawn of 1974, Mississippi entered into an era of reconstruction as it tried to birth a biracial civilization in lands polarized still by racial hate.

PART III

BIRACIAL REPUBLIC:
STATE OF COMMONWEALTH, 1974-2010

“. . . for ourselves and for humanity, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man.”¹

—Frantz Fanon

“The great end of men’s entering into society being the enjoyment of their properties in peace and safety, and the great instrument and means of that being the laws established in that society; the first and fundamental positive law of all commonwealths is the establishing of the legislative power; as the first and fundamental natural law, which is to govern even the legislative itself, is the preservation of society, and (as far as will consist with the public good) of every person in it . . . and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the subjects.”²

—John Locke

“The character of Mississippi is on trial, and it will remain on trial until justice come rolling down like the waters.”³

—Reverend Joseph Lowery

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 239.

² John Locke, “Second Treaties of Government,” in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 780-781.

³ Emily Wagster, “Civil Rights Leader Pleads for New Dahmer Probe,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 14, 1994, Dahmer Collection, McCain Library & Archives, USM.

CHAPTER XI

RECONSTRUCTION: REBUILDING WITH THE ENEMY

In the 12 years following the end of the Civil Rights Movement, blacks launched a Second Reconstruction across the Central Piney Woods. Their effort to build a biracial society proved a monumental task because even though the Movement had destroyed the Jim Crow system, it had not vanquished white supremacy. Federal laws struck down *de jure* segregation and protected black suffrage. But they failed to transform racist minds, and they failed to provide blacks with the political power and economic opportunities necessary to ensure racial equity. Black suffrage did not alter the white power structure in the Central Piney Woods because blacks, as the minority population in both Forrest and Jones counties, lacked the power to affect election outcomes dramatically. Whites maintained their supremacy by electing racially conservative whites to their governing bodies and as their judges, sheriffs, and county and district attorneys. As white mayors appointed all whites to head departments staffed with nearly all white employees, the majority race still controlled black access to public services, public safety, justice, education, and employment. Having no dependency on the black vote, whites ignored black interests, and they often used their power to mistreat African Americans.

Many scholars refer to the Civil Rights Movement as the Second Reconstruction, but war seems the more suitable characterization for the Movement and the Second Reconstruction the appropriate appellation for the post-civil rights era. A century earlier, after the North won the Civil War, the federal government launched the first Reconstruction as it tried to move blacks from the status of slave to that of equal citizen by passing the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. However, after white

southerners reclaimed their autonomy, they built a white tyranny and forced blacks into the ranks of the disfranchised caste. In the 1960s, black freedom fighters launched a nonviolent revolution against the white tyranny which used terrorism, espionage, and the imprisonment of revolutionaries to sustain its racial police state. By 1974 the Civil Rights Revolution destroyed the white tyranny and forced whites to free blacks from the disfranchised caste. Nevertheless, still determined to maintain their supremacy, whites sought to prevent the ascent of blacks to equal citizenship. In 1974 Congressman William Colmer argued that the rush to make blacks equal citizens would prove disastrous because blacks, who had suffered for centuries in the “Dark Continent” that deprived them of the civilizing influences of education and Christianity, had not evolved at the same pace as whites. Thus, through political maneuverings, whites replaced their white tyranny with a white aristocracy as they forced blacks into the rank of second-class citizenship. Once again, blacks had achieved a new modicum of liberation, but not equality.¹

African Americans refused to accept the status of inferiority. Once again, black activists rose to battle white supremacy—this time to win the peace. The Second Reconstruction, they determined, unlike the first, would prove a lasting success. They were determined to become first-class citizens with the same opportunities, rights, and protections as their white counterparts. The destruction of the Klan and federal intervention emboldened white progressive to ally themselves with black activists. The University of Southern Mississippi became a force of racial progress in the Central Piney

¹ William M. Colmer, interview by Joe B. Frantz, May 5, 1974, 26-27, William M. Colmer Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM].

Woods under its new president, Aubrey Lucas. As the black student population increased dramatically, blacks integrated student government and extracurricular activities and developed connections across racial lines that aided them in their future career and civil rights endeavors. Of equal importance, blacks formed alliances with progressive white litigators, and armed with a host of federal statutes, they launched lawsuits against the police force, the fire department, schools, and governing bodies as they struggled to force authorities to open political power to blacks, to terminate racial discrimination in employment and education, and to fight racial injustice. Again blacks faced a daunting white enemy that wielded all of its power to deflect black challenges in a political war of attrition. The methods of the Second Reconstruction differed in many ways from the Movement era. White supremacists swapped violence and imprisonment for political manipulation, and activists cast aside the street demonstration in favor of lawsuits. Although the turn in methodologies caused the sensationalism of the Movement epoch to fade into the past, the battles over the peace proved as significant as the melees of the war.

The first battle of the post-civil rights era began in dramatic fashion when on April 14, 1974, the Leaf River flooded and submerged river bank communities across Forrest and Jones counties, most of which were black neighborhoods. The devastation forced the governing bodies in the Central Piney Wood to develop relief and recovery plans and to relocate displaced persons in a post-segregated society. Historically, segregation had consigned blacks of all classes to reside on the low ground in the flood zones, and African Americans had grown accustomed to periodic evacuation and difficult material losses. The flood of 1974, however, was unmatched in its destruction, and it

forever altered black life in the Central Piney Woods. The day before the flood, black men piled into trucks and drove through the streets of the Mobile-Bouie community, warning their neighbors to pack all they could and flee. Isaac Fairley and his 20-year-old son Kenneth had spent most of the week helping their neighbors build “horses”—high wooden platforms on which they stacked their belongings. They had not finished building horses for their homes when the flood began. It was too late to save anything but their lives. Kenneth’s new vehicle stalled, and he had to leave it behind too. As his father drove them toward higher ground, he looked back one last time at his family home and the new home he had purchased for his fiancée.²

On April 14, the Leaf River crested at 34 feet and swallowed communities along its banks. After the surge, the waters stilled but refused to recede. National Guardsmen patrolled the watery landscape in boats, searching for stranded people. Neighborhoods had grown silent except for the “cries and howls of trapped animals.” The flood killed eight people, destroyed 8,000 homes, and drowned hundreds of pets. As soon as danger passed, Fairley caught a ride on a friend’s boat to survey the damage to his neighborhood. He was shocked when he found the home he had bought for his bride-to-be under water. When they reached his parent’s home, through the holes in the roof, he stared despondently at their prized encyclopedias floating away in the mucky water. When the

² Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. Natasha Smith, “Mobile Street Memories,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 2006.

waters receded on April 20, residents returned to their mud-drenched homes, by then infested with insects and snakes. Fred Burns, who had recently completed his service in the army, rushed home from Chicago to help his parents. When he drove through his childhood neighborhood in Newman Quarters, he was shocked at the sight of furniture, appliances, and clothing strewn across the streets “like a war zone.” Burns and his siblings hauled their destroyed furniture and appliances to the dump. They spent days shoveling mud and scrubbing floors with bleach. In Laurel, the flood wiped out the KC Bottom community where civil rights activist Johnny Magee’s family had rented a small home for years. They had been through so many floods before, but he had never witnessed anything quite as horrific. The 1974 flood left few homes standing in the Bottom and rendered thousands homeless.³

After the flood, throughout the black communities some people began the process of rebuilding, but others—many of those with means—decided that it was time to move out of the flood zone. Magee moved to another black community, the Southside, because the KC Bottom was gone. Other blacks migrated to white neighborhoods. It was 1974, and forced segregation had ended. After their wedding, Kenneth and Sandra Fairley moved into the integrated married-student housing community at the University of

³ First quote, Carolyn Haines, “It’s Not an Easy Thing,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 1974; second quote, Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Johnny Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording; Carolyn Haines, “The Long Struggle Back Begins,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 21, 1974; Dick Tarbutton, “Area Faces Flood Disaster as Rivers Boom,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 17, 1974; Natasha Smith, “Mobile Street Memories,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 2006; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, “Abstract,” *Post Disaster Report on April 1974 Floods in Mississippi in the Mobile District*, May 1974, United States Geological Survey Water Resources in Mississippi, http://choctaw.er.usgs.gov/new_web/reports/other_reports/flood/april74postdisaster.html.

Southern Mississippi. They left behind a community that had struggled so hard and achieved so much, but with its great victories came great losses and new battles. As the Fairleys and many other blacks migrated into once whites-only neighborhoods, patronized once white-only businesses and restaurants, sought to strengthen their presence in the schools and workforce, they learned that the battle for racial equality had just begun. It was difficult for many blacks to trust their new fair-skinned neighbors, colleagues, and fellow students not only because of the tortured past but because of the troubled present. Other blacks remained in the old neighborhoods, and they too confronted struggles as they tried to rebuild. Burns' parents rebuilt in Newman Quarters, and when he moved back to Hattiesburg that September, he too settled in his old neighborhood. Yet, as he and his parents rebuilt, they realized that they could never reconstruct the community. As the black middle class began its exodus out of the flood zones, and the government neglected to respond adequately to the disastrous effects of the flood and economic shifts, the Burns witnessed both the descent of the black poor into a perpetual impoverished state and the breaking of the beloved black community.⁴

In the immediate aftermath of the flood, political officials promised flood victims federal and state funds for recovery and relief. Yet Mayor A. L. Gerrard, Jr. of Hattiesburg also warned that a new ordinance prohibited the rebuilding in flood zones unless owners met federal requirements such as structuring homes and businesses on stilts. Many poor blacks lacked the financial resources to move or to meet the flood zone

⁴ Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Johnny Magee, interview; Kelly Carson, "History Pushes Town West," *Hattiesburg American*, February 25, 1996, Hattiesburg History Vertical File, McCain, USM; Natasha Smith, "Mobile Street Memories," *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 2006.

reconstruction requirements. Outraged over the government's response, NAACP leaders in Jones, Forrest, Perry, Wayne, and Covington counties formed a Flood Victims Committee and conducted an investigation into the needs of the displaced and the failings of the government. Hattiesburg activists dominated the committee with leaders like J. C. Fairley, E. E. Grimmett, Earleane Boyd, Pinky Hall, Clarence Magee, and James Boykin. In Laurel, Susie Ruffin was the best known member.⁵

On June 20, 1974, the committee members, armed with a petition containing thousands of signatures, demanded that local, state, and federal officials revise their flood response plan, and they stressed that the U. S. Congress must improve the "Federal Disaster Emergency Repair Guidelines" so as to aid the impoverished victims. They demanded that officials distribute emergency funds to victims immediately and provide permanent housing for displaced persons. To prevent future flood disasters, they requested that the government improve the prevention plan. Finally, to ensure the fair distribution of relief funds and housing allotments for the displaced, they demanded the creation of a new assessment committee, composed of members from the flooded neighborhoods, to evaluate and assess victim grievances. The governing bodies ignored most of these demands. Black residents received some government aid, and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided some homeowners like Burns' parents with a low interest loan to rebuild. Yet the government rejected requests

⁵ "Mayor Issues Statement on Flood and Recovery," *Hattiesburg American*, April 17, 1974; "Red Cross to Move Headquarters," *Hattiesburg American*, April 19, 1974; Ben Lee, "Council Will Try Again for a Flood-insurance Ordinance," *Hattiesburg American*, April 18, 1974; Forrest County Branch of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People and the Flood Victims Committee, Recommendations and Petition, June 20, 1974, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Flood Victims Petition, HMR].

to rebuild in those communities completely devastated by the flood, including the KC Bottom. Most KC Bottom residents were renters, so the government relocated many of them to Brown Circle, a public housing community.⁶

By 1977 local officials still had failed to develop flood prevention plans for black communities. Black activists in Hattiesburg remained concerned, not only that the Leaf River would flood again, but that when it flooded, it would pour all the toxic run-off from the nearby Hercules Powder Plant into black neighborhoods. J. C. Fairley suggested building a dam. But the Corps of Engineers moved slowly, and federal officials claimed it would take 10 years before they could complete a study of the idea. Over the next six years, these stalling tactics managed to quell the passion of the black community until the river rose again causing the NAACP and residents to express concerns. Then officials made new empty promises, and the passion again simmered, as the community waited, and the threats of a flood receded. So the cycle repeated. Nearly six years after the flood, Fairley, the NAACP, and the Flood Victims Committee initiated one last stand against the discriminatory recovery plans. On March 19, 1980, Fairley sent a letter and a petition containing thousands of signatures to Mayor Gerrard to protest the city's flood ordinance, which deemed the property of persons rebuilding in flood zones—primarily in black neighborhoods—unprotected and uninsurable. Many of these residents lacked the finances to purchase a home in non-flood zones, particularly since their properties in the flood zone were so devalued that they could not sell them. So, they held out hope that the government would build structures to protect their properties. The government ignored

⁶ Flood Victims Petition, HMR. Johnny Magee, interview; Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009.

Fairley's complaints, and the traditional black neighborhoods continued to decline.⁷

The historically black neighborhoods also became victims of integration and massive economic shifts. Farming mechanization, the decline of manufacturing, and the rise and fall of Laurel's oil industry, decimated the black working class. Simultaneously, the twin developments of integration and the rise of "retail giants" devastated black businesses. Blacks flocked to the rising new mega grocery stores and the shopping malls that burgeoned in the suburbs in the mid-seventies and over the next decade. Small black-owned businesses suffered more than their white counterparts because their appeal had always been limited to the black population, and because most of them were located in flood zones. Business owners whose structures were destroyed in the flood could not secure loans to rebuild, and the businesses that survived the flood could not survive integration. Within a decade, most black businesses had dried up and closed, and their middle and working class employees had joined the growing pool of the jobless. Black capitalism, one of the historic strengths of the black community in the Central Piney Woods, was dying, while black unemployment skyrocketed. The black poor began their descent into a state that many scholars referred to as an underclass.⁸

⁷ J. C. Fairley, interview by Mike Garvey, January 31, 1974, vol. 375, 93-94, MOHP. J. C. Fairley to A. L. Gerrard, Jr., March 19, 1980; Flood Victims Petition, HMR.

⁸ For Forrest County, see, Reuben Mees, "Mobile Street Revitalization Will be Huge Task," *Hattiesburg American*, April 9, 2006, Hattiesburg, MS Revitalization Vertical File, McCain USM; Geoff Pender, "Older Part of Hub City Deteriorating," *Hattiesburg American*, August 1, 1993, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. Arthur Siggers, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2009, June 10, 2009. For Jones County, see, Johnny Magee, interview; Vern Geddie, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 21, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 435-436, MOHP. David Stanton Key, "Laurel, Mississippi: A Historical Perspective," (M.A. thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2001), 82-83. Walmart first came to Mississippi in 1974 and vastly changed the

Nevertheless, even as many blacks descended into an underclass, the Civil Rights Movement and the post-civil rights reconstruction provided others with unprecedented opportunities for socioeconomic gains. African Americans, who found the means to acquire vocational training or to educate themselves and enter the professional workforce, obtained employment, housing, and consumer opportunities outside traditional black communities. In Hattiesburg, the University of Southern Mississippi was at the heart of that shift. Still the prized jewel of Hattiesburg, USM also became one of the most important forces for racial transformation in the Central Piney Woods when Aubrey Lucas assumed the presidency. After President William McCain retired in 1975, Lucas resigned his presidency at Delta State University to return to Hattiesburg and his beloved USM. Lucas perceived his presidency, in part, as an opportunity to redeem the university from its tragic Jim Crow past, perhaps because he hoped it would exorcise the university's most haunting crime: the rejection of Clyde Kennard. In 1959, when Kennard sought to desegregate the institution, Lucas, under President McCain's direction, delivered the rejection letter to Kennard.⁹

economic landscape in the Central Piney Woods, see, Walmart History Timeline, <http://walmartstores.com/AboutUs/7603.aspx> (accessed October 2010); For various arguments as to the causes and perpetuation of the black underclass, see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Michael B. Katz, *The "Underclass" Debate: Views of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, reprinted 1981).

⁹ Aubrey Lucas, interview by Patricia Boyett, April 29, 2010, MOHP recording; Nikki Davis Maute, "Doing It His Way," *Hattiesburg American*, September 3, 1995; Lance Davis, "Lucas to Leave Post," *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 1996.

In 1975 Lucas, devoted to the Methodist teachings of social justice, worked with black students and professors to set the university on a racially progressive path. An elegant and intelligent southern gentleman, Lucas transformed the university without great battles or controversy but with gentle persuasion. In 1965, under the force of law, McCain had desegregated the university, but Lucas, guided by his conscience, truly integrated the campus. During Lucas' tenure, dormitories and married-student housing at USM became one of the few fully integrated residential areas in Forrest County. To draw black students to USM, Lucas worked with his staff and administrators to recruit blacks to work in residence life and student affairs, involve them in the life of the university, and ensure that recruiters and publications were multiracial. Black organizations, including the Afro-American Cultural Society and the NAACP youth chapter thrived on campus. In 1975 black students chartered the first black fraternities on campus. In great contrast to the McCain presidency, Lucas initiated an "open door policy" and sent the word out that he welcomed student visits. He also hired a black woman, Jewel Tucker, as his administrative assistant secretary in hopes that the diversity in his office would encourage black students to visit him. Soon, Lucas was busy with student visits as black and white students shared with him their hopes for USM.¹⁰

Black students embraced Lucas' reforms and sought to further advance them. Determined to renovate the culture of the university so that it reflected the values of all its students, African Americans implored Lucas to remove those symbols and terminate

¹⁰ Quoting Aubrey Lucas, interview; Nikki Davis Maute, "Doing It His Way," *Hattiesburg American*, September 3, 1995; Lance Davis, "Lucas to Leave Post," *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 1996; Charles Lawrence, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010; Greek Life, history, University of Southern Mississippi, <http://southernmissgreeks.com/history>.

those campus traditions that celebrated the Confederacy. To them, the ritual of waving Confederate flags, singing “Dixie” at the football games, and cheering on the General Nat mascot modeled after Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general and the first Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, reflected a society that valued white supremacy. Black band members despised singing “Dixie” because, as they told Lucas, “it’s not our song [and] it reminds us of a very hurtful time.” They found Lucas not only empathetic to their plight, but as determined as them to unchain Southern Miss from its tragic racial past. Lucas confronted little opposition when he led the charge in terminating the practice of waving Confederate flags at the games and replacing General Nat with the Golden Eagles. Yet the band director refused to strike “Dixie” from the program. Though many whites supported the director, others, like trombonist Wayne Landers, found it awkward to join the song while his black band mates and the African Americans in the crowds fell silent. After many discussions, Lucas convinced the director to replace “Dixie” with the USM alma mater.¹¹

Lucas also responded with sensitivity toward the few black protests that broke out on campus during his tenure. In the mid-1970s, in hopes of electing a black homecoming queen, several blacks including Kenneth Fairley led the black student body in replicating a winning strategy implemented at Blair High School a few years earlier—they nominated one black candidate and let whites split their votes between several white nominees. When the university crowned a white woman, black students, convinced that the white counters had cheated, protested in front of President Lucas’ office. Lucas

¹¹ Quoting, Aubrey Lucas, interview. Wayne Landers, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2010, MOHP recording; Yvonne Arnold, “History of University of Southern Mississippi,” McCain, USM; “Eagle Mascot Began with a Bee,” *Student Printz*, September 12, 1995; USM Mascot Vertical File, McCain, USM.

persuaded Fairley to help him facilitate a meeting between the black faculty, the staff, and black students. During the meeting, when Lucas asked Fairley his opinion, he said, “Well perception is real to whomever is perceiving it. Whether it is fair or not, they believe it is unfair.” After the meeting, Lucas asked Fairley to oversee black student relations. During that time, Fairley also began working in the athletic department as a recruiter.¹²

Under the leadership of President Lucas, USM, once a bastion of white supremacy, became the hub of racial progress. The university attracted black students and became the most integrated of the three largest universities in the state. Blacks not only attended the university but became a vital part of the life of the institution. The student body elected black homecoming queens and presidents, and a black student became editor of the student newspaper. Toward the end of Lucas’ tenure in the early 1990s, Lucas also made a symbolic gesture to redeem USM from its haunting past. After Clyde Kennard’s brother-in-law, Reverend John Webb, requested that Lucas find a way to honor Kennard’s memory, Lucas and a committee named the student services building after both Kennard, the first African American to seek entrance into USM, and Walter Washington, the first African American to receive his doctorate at the university. At the dedication ceremony, Lucas declared: “Clyde Kennard is a haunting memory of opportunities denied; Walter Washington is a wonderful example of opportunities fulfilled . . . let this building teach us.”¹³

¹² Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

¹³ Quoting Aubrey Lucas, interview by Patricia Boyett, April 29, 2010, MOHP recording. Yvonne Arnold, “History of the University of Southern Mississippi”; Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, *Fall 2006*

The city of Hattiesburg lagged behind USM. As blacks graduated from high schools and colleges, they confronted far greater socioeconomic struggles than their white counterparts in the Central Piney Woods. The termination of Jim Crow provided middle class blacks with opportunities to pursue many careers once denied them and to live in neighborhoods once closed to them. However, as they migrated to once white-only neighborhoods, few lived near whites for any length of time as whites fled. They also confronted racial discrimination in the job market, which despite improvements, still inhibited their opportunities for advancement. African Americans learned to maneuver around these obstacles by seeking employment at USM, in civil rights organizations, or as salesman in department stores, which hired blacks to appeal to their new black customer base. After Charles Lawrence, a USM graduate, completed Howard Law School, he returned to Hattiesburg and began his law career with the Southeast Mississippi Legal Services founded by Martha Bergmark, a white civil rights activist from Jackson. In 1974 Eddie Holloway received his graduate degree in counseling at USM, and he spent most of his career as a university counselor and later the dean of students at USM. While Fred Burns completed a degree in business administration at USM, he worked as bookkeeper for the Mississippi Southeast Community Action Agency. Although Johnny DuPree had to defer his dreams of a college education and turn down two scholarships because his girlfriend, Johniece, was pregnant, DuPree acquired a job as a salesman at Sears to support his wife and daughter. He worked his way into

Enrollment Fact Book & A Ten Year Enrollment Comparisons & Selected Information on Diversity (Jackson, Mississippi: Office of Research and Planning, 2006), 27-42. Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 30, 2008, MOHP recording; Nita Chilton McCan, "USM honors 1st Black Who Tried to Enroll," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 13, 1993.

management, and when time permitted, he took courses at USM. Fairley used his experience at USM as a recruiter for the athletic department to launch a successful career as a sports agent, and he became a part-time pastor at Mount Carmel Baptist Church. Most of his parishioners and clients were black.¹⁴

Some African Americans sought work in city and state agencies because in theory civil service jobs used the merit system for hiring. In reality, blacks faced rampant discrimination in state and local agencies. Despite affirmative action plans, as of 1974, Mississippi state agencies prevented black inclusion, in part by refusing to use a standard merit testing system. The method worked: whites comprised 94.2 percent and blacks 5.8 percent of the state employees. A majority of the agencies lacked a single black employee. Generally, the state restricted African Americans to low-paying and low-level positions, and no blacks served in upper management positions or headed one of the multitudinous state agencies. An official of the Agricultural and Industrial Board declared that “other than a secretary or mail room job there really isn’t anything that a black would fit into here.” Blacks in the Central Piney Woods faced similar exclusion from employment in municipal and county departments.¹⁵

The NAACP branches in Forrest and Jones counties fought to force equal opportunities for blacks in the job market by fighting employment discrimination in

¹⁴ Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Fred Burns, interviews; Charles Lawrence, interview; Eddie Holloway, interview. Johnny DuPree, interview, by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009; Joe Norman, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2010, both MOHP recordings; Eric Stringfellow, “Sunday Morning with Martha Bergmark,” *The Clarion - Ledger*, June 19, 2005.

¹⁵ Quoting *Mississippi, Hardly An Equal Opportunity Employer* (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Council on Human Relations, February 1974), 12; *Ibid.*, 2-33.

federal courts, and with such efforts they launched some of their most important battles of the post-civil rights era. The NAACP targeted racial discrimination in the police and fire departments because such institutions, which provided citizens their most basic rights in a representative democracy—the protection of their persons and property—had few black employees. In a landscape still infested with racism, the white-dominated departments showed little interest in protecting black communities. In Laurel, the battle began in 1973 when the Laurel Fire Department (LFD) rejected African American James Dace’s application on the grounds that he had failed the entrance examination test. Dace and most blacks accused the LFD—a nearly all-white department—of rejecting him because he was black. With the support of the Jones County NAACP, Dace filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.¹⁶

Over the next four years, the Department of Justice investigated the LFD. As of 1977, the LFD employed only two blacks on its 67-person staff. Moreover, while the LFD provided all of its white employees with permanent employment positions, it placed its two black employees on temporary employment status. On February 23, 1978, the Department of Justice filed a complaint with the U.S. District Court in which it accused the LFD of discrimination in hiring, a violation of both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Revenue Sharing Act of 1972. Department of Justice attorneys argued that the fire department should represent the population it protected. Since blacks comprised 30.8

¹⁶ *United States of America v. City of Laurel, a municipal corporation; Thomas Pickering, Fire Chief; J. W. Carmichael, Chairman, Laurel Civil Service Commission* (1978), case no. H78-0023 (C), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *US v. Pickering* (1978)]. Judy Burke, “City Agrees to Employ More Black Firefighters,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 24, 1978; Jimmie Bunch, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, MOHP recording.

percent of Laurel's population, black firefighters should comprise close to 30.8 percent of the department's employees. On February 24, the U.S. District Court agreed and ordered the LFD to terminate discriminatory policies immediately, and to recruit black firefighters. By that point, the two black firefighters had quit because of the intense prejudice from their co-workers and bosses.¹⁷

In 1979, the LFD started recruiting black firefighters, though slowly. Jimmie Bunch had long dreamed of becoming a firefighter, but when he graduated high school in 1972, his high school counselor informed him that the department never hired blacks. So when Bunch graduated as part of the first integrated class at Watkins High School, he joined the military and served in places as far away from Laurel as Okinawa. In 1975, after Bunch left the service as a Specialist Four, he joined the reserves, returned to Laurel, and applied for a position at the LFD. During the long battle over Dace's lawsuit, the LFD rejected Bunch's application on three occasions. Finally, on January 1, 1979, Chief Thomas Pickering hired Bunch. He was the only black man in the department throughout most of that year, and his fellow firefighters treated him with disdain. Still, Bunch informed his superiors that "the only way I am going to leave here is, retire or die." Several of his superiors tested Bunch's resolve. Every Laurel firefighter had to pass a street test to prove that they knew all ingresses and egresses to and from every street in Laurel. Since Bunch's superiors restricted him to training in the black areas, he was unfamiliar with the streets in white communities and failed the test.¹⁸

¹⁷ *U.S. v. Pickering* (1978); Judy Burke, "City Agrees to Employ More Black Firefighters," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 24, 1978.

¹⁸ Jamie Bunch, interview.

Undeterred, Bunch spent his off-hours driving through white neighborhoods to study them. During one of his drives, a police officer pulled him over because a resident feared that he was “casing the neighborhood.” Bunch explained to the officer and later to the woman caller that he worked for the fire department, and he was trying to learn the streets so in the event of a fire or an emergency, he would know the fastest route to reach their homes. Soon after, Bunch passed the test, but a month later, his shift captain ordered him to take the test again—a task never required of any other LFD firefighter. The following day, Bunch filed a complaint with Chief Pickering and requested his permission to take his case to city hall. Pickering, whom Bunch liked and considered fair, informed him that he was acting under the direction of whites at city hall. To appease the patriarchs, Pickering placed Bunch on probation for six months, but he guaranteed him that he would never have to take the test again. Within six months, Pickering hired another black firefighter, James Brown. Still, by 1985, only six of the 67 LFD employees were black, and they all continued to confront discrimination. Bunch became particularly incensed when the white firefighters announced during a union meeting that they wanted their new uniforms to bear the Confederate flag, a symbol that offended most Mississippi blacks. When blacks protested, whites proposed using the state flag patch instead. The proposal irritated Bunch because the state flag bore the Confederate battle flag. All of the black firemen and a few of their white coworkers voted to use the firefighter patch instead, but the white majority outvoted them. Since Bunch refused to quit, he wore the uniform. Still, he vowed someday that he would have that patch removed.¹⁹

Similar to the Jones County NAACP battle in the fire department, the Forrest

¹⁹ Quoting Jamie Bunch interview; “NAACP Plans Quota Suit,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 10, 1985.

County branch of the NAACP achieved ambivalent results in its crusade against discrimination in the Hattiesburg Police Department. Throughout the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights Movement, police officers had served as the storm troopers of the white supremacist system. Since 1958 blacks had protested publicly against police brutality, and beginning in 1966 blacks initiated several demonstrations against Chief Hugh Herring, whom they accused of running a white-dominated, racist department that brutalized blacks. Still, Herring remained chief. While a beat officer, Herring had himself engaged in brutality when he arrested and beat Willie McGee after a white woman falsely accused him of rape. Massive protests during the Movement forced the HPD to hire black officers, but brutality continued. Many of the black officers became lackeys of the white-run department, and some were as brutal as their white counterparts.

After years of protest, the HPD hired six new black officers: Alvin Eaton, John Smith, Jr., Paul Taylor, T. J. Gordon, John Duncan, and Clarence McKinley. Although these officers protected rather than brutalized the community, they faced considerable discrimination from Herring and white officers. Chief Herring refused to provide black officers with basic law enforcement power over whites by restricting them to beats in black neighborhoods. On the occasion that he was short white officers and needed black police to patrol white areas, he divested them of their authority to take white suspects into custody. Rather, they had to call a white officer to the scene to execute the arrest. Conversely, white officers patrolled black and white neighborhoods with equal authority. The chief also ordered officers of both races to aggressively patrol black neighborhoods. As the chief considered blacks more prone to criminal behavior than whites, he expected the department's arrest sheets to reflect his views. On the occasions that Officer Eaton

arrested more whites than blacks, the chief ordered him into his office for “counseling” on black criminality.²⁰

Many white policemen not only continued to mistreat black citizens but tried to force black officers to follow their lead. Often, while patrolling black neighborhoods with black officers, white policemen harassed black citizens until they provoked a black person to react unlawfully. At that point, the white officer ordered his black counterpart to arrest the person. Frequently, white police attacked black suspects in their custody. Despite the pervasive brutality, one black arrestee, Leo Bender, refused to cower to his white arresting officers. During a heated exchange between Bender and Officer Lauder, Bender derisively referred to him as “white boy.” Infuriated, Lauder, “banged [Bender’s] head against the sergeant’s desk and slapped him while he was handcuffed.” Of course, white officers and the chief habitually used the terms “black boy” and “nigger,” and they always identified black residential areas as “nigger quarters.”²¹

Whenever possible, Chief Herring privileged his white officers over their black counterparts. The chief never offered black officers the opportunity to earn extra pay during the Christmas season or during festive events when the city requested overtime patrols. Such opportunities remained whites-only privileges. The department also

²⁰ Quoting, Alvin Eaton, affidavit, July 13, 1972, complaint, *Alvin Eaton et al. v. The City of Hattiesburg, Hugh Herring, Civil Service Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Paul Grady, Hattiesburg City Council* (1972), case no. 724-30, HMR, [hereinafter cited as *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), HMR]. Paul Taylor, affidavit, July 13, 1972, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), HMR.

²¹ Quoting John Smith, Paul Taylor, T. J. Gordon, July 13, 1972, affidavits, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972). For Bender story, see, John Smith, affidavit, July 13, 1972, *Alvin Eaton v. the City of Hattiesburg*, case no. 72-30 (1972) n. d., Transfer No. 021780238, Box 1, Location No. 10030672, Civil Cases, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, Georgia, [hereinafter cited as *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), NARA].

discriminated against blacks in promotional opportunities. Herring ensured that higher ranked positions remained whites-only jobs by sending rookie white officers over experienced black police to training courses necessary for promotions. Consequently, only one black officer had achieved a rank above patrolman. The chief also allocated superior equipment to whites. African American officers found that their hand-me-down vehicles constantly broke down. The chief declined requests to replace them, as he claimed “they,” meaning blacks, “always tore them up.” Herring even forbade black officers from driving vehicles assigned to white officers when those officers were off-duty and their vehicles unused. Black officers complained about these discriminations to Mayor Paul Grady, but he refused to intervene.²²

By 1972, black policemen, including several who had resigned, decided the time had come to protest the persistence of discrimination in the HPD. Officers Eaton, Smith, Taylor, Gordon, Duncan, and McKinley, in conjunction with the Forrest County NAACP, initiated a class action lawsuit against Chief Herring, Mayor Paul Grady, the City Commissioners, and the City of Hattiesburg. The plaintiffs’ lawyer, Douglass Baker, accused the defendants of violating the Fourteenth Amendment and federal statutes by employing discriminatory practices in the hiring, promotion, and treatment of black police officers. Baker demanded the cessation of discriminatory practices and the implementation of an affirmative action plan. While the court took the case under advisement, whites in Hattiesburg harassed Baker.²³

²² Quoting Paul Taylor, affidavit, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), HMR. John Smith, T. J. Gordon, and Alvin Eaton, affidavits, July 13, 1972, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg*, HMR.

²³ For complaint, see, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg*, HMR. For Herring’s response, see, Chief Hugh Herring, affidavit, July 17, 1972, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), NARA. For

Many local whites despised Baker long before he launched the lawsuit against the HPD. His family had been active in the local NAACP since the 1940s, and Baker had joined the youth chapter as a teenager. During the late sixties, he became the first African American to complete a law degree at the University of Mississippi. Baker enjoyed the study of constitutional law and found great inspiration in the civil rights cases argued by his hero, Thurgood Marshall. When he returned to Hattiesburg to practice law, he became the first black lawyer to reside in the Hub City. Because Baker had launched many lawsuits against institutional and systematic racism as well as cases against private discrimination, he became known, and was often hated by whites, as that “civil rights lawyer who agitated.” Baker also enraged many whites when he rented a home in a predominantly white area of town. His white neighbors tried to drive him out with threatening phone calls. One night, when Baker drove into his neighborhood, he spotted several white men breaking into his home. He drove away. The white men tore apart his home but stole nothing. The following day, Baker moved out. Still, white men watched Baker closely as they searched for ways to ruin him. He provided them with an opportunity when he embezzled a small sum of money. One of Baker’s clients had given him a check to deposit in a trust account for her cousin, but Baker put the money into his personal account instead. He intended to use the funds to keep himself and his firm afloat while he awaited client payments and then he would deposit the money into the trust account. The practice was not uncommon among lawyers, but white supremacists used it to destroy litigators whom they considered a threat to the racial order. In the 1950s, whites had ensured the disbarment of John Poole on similar charges because he had

Douglass T. Baker’s involvement, see Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008, MOHP recording.

defended Willie McGee. Their attack on Baker was even harsher. The district attorney charged Baker with two counts of embezzlement. Baker pled guilty, and Judge Stanton Hall sentenced him to three years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. Within a week, he was disbarred. Still, Baker's incarceration and disbarment failed to terminate the lawsuit.²⁴

Finally, in 1975, Judge Dan Russell, Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi reviewed the HPD case. Chief Herring denied all the charges levied by the black police against the HPD. He claimed that he never discriminated against blacks nor used the word "nigger," but rather referred to black areas as "negro" quarters. He further professed that he allocated equipment and assigned vehicles in a racially unbiased manner and provided black officers with the same authority as their white counterparts. In a watershed decision, Judge Russell ruled in favor of the black officers. He ordered city officials and the HPD to work with the NAACP and pertinent state and federal agencies to develop an affirmative action plan that would maintain a racial composition of at least 30 percent black officers, and he directed the chief to assign them to jurisdictions beyond minority neighborhoods, and to all units within the department, including prominent and visible positions. The judge also ordered the chief and his officers to cease using racial epithets, and he instructed Herring to implement punitive sanctions for repeat offenders. The ruling had a domino effect. By December

²⁴ Quoting Douglass T. Baker, interview. *State of Mississippi v. Douglass T. Baker* (1973), case no. 7699, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 466, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; "Baker Indicted Again," *Hattiesburg American*, March 9 1973; "Baker Enters Innocent Plea," *Hattiesburg American*, March 10, 1973; "Will Investigate Baker," *Hattiesburg American*, March 15, 1973; "Baker is Sentenced," *Hattiesburg American*, March 22, 1973. For the treatment of John Poole, see, Alex Heard, *The Eyes of Willie McGee: A Tragedy of Race, Sex, and Secrets in the Jim Crow South* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 348.

1977, Laurel had developed an affirmative action plan in its police department.²⁵

However, even this landmark ruling failed to deliver equal justice to blacks.

According to Kenneth Fairley, when Arlon Moulds took over the HPD in the late seventies, police brutality “was just off the charts. We lived in fear.” Still, Moulds had no choice but to follow the orders of the court in terms of racial quotas, and he had to rescind job offers to several white candidates including Wayne Landers, a recent USM graduate who had interned with the HPD. Disappointed, Landers took a job with the Canton Department 120 miles north of Hattiesburg. Landers, though raised in Alabama during the Movement years, lacked the racist mentality of many southern whites. His deeply religious parents expected him and his brother to honor Christian fellowship, and he never grew accustomed to the racial hatred that exploded across the South during his youth. When Landers attended USM, he worked as a resident assistant under African American resident manager, Eddie Holloway, and he considered him a friend. He was shocked by the racism that pervaded the Canton Police Department and disturbed by the rampant police brutality. Weekly, he contacted Chief Moulds and begged him for a job. Less than a year later, Moulds hired Landers. According to Landers, the HPD also had problems with racism and brutality. Despite the 1975 court ruling, Chief Moulds routinely promoted whites over their senior black officers, and he tolerated racist language and brutality in his department. Landers’s bosses constantly used the “n word,” and most of the veteran white officers considered black officers beneath them. Only a

²⁵ Quoting complaint, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), HMR; Decision, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), HMR. Chief Hugh Herring, affidavit, July 17, 1972, *Eaton v. Hattiesburg* (1972), 72-30, NARA; Douglass T. Baker, interview; City of Hattiesburg Affirmative Action Plan Police and Fire Departments, June 16, 1977, HMR. For response in Laurel, see, Resolution Endorsing Civil Rights Law and Executive Orders Applicable to City of Laurel, HMR.

handful of officers had college degrees, and most veteran officers resented their educated subordinates. They honored machismo over intelligence and approached citizens and suspects alike aggressively. Many of the younger white law enforcement officers like Landers lacked the racist mentality of their preceding generation, but it would take time for them to change the department.²⁶

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the rampant brutality and racism in the HPD led to unfounded arrests and prosecutions, and even false convictions of innocent black men. The most glaring injustice began on a hot Mississippi night in May 1979, after a black man raped a white woman, Eva Gail Patterson, in front of her four-year-old son and then slit her throat. A few days later, police arrested a 19-year-old black man, Larry Ruffin, and beat him until he confessed. Police ignored the fact that Patterson's son Luke had insisted that only one man had hurt his mother, and they had arrested two other black men, Philipp Bivens and Ray Dixon, and accused them of accessory to rape and murder. Police beat Ruffin and Dixon and threatened Bivens until all of the men confessed. Dixon's beating was so severe that he had to walk with a cane for the rest of his life.

In the winter of 1980, prosecutors tried Ruffin on the paltry evidence of coerced confessions and Dixon's shaky testimony. On the stand, Ruffin declared his innocence and insisted that he had only confessed to the crime because authorities beat him and threatened him. When prosecutors called Dixon to the stand as a witness against Ruffin, Dixon initially confessed that he witnessed Dixon and Ruffin rape Patterson, watched as Ruffin murdered her, and then helped both men escape. As his testimony continued, however, he revealed that he was only testifying because he was scared and he hoped to

²⁶ First quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; second quote, Wayne Landers, interview.

receive a reduced sentence for his cooperation. Then, he recanted his confession and declared: “I wasn’t there. I ain’t never seen the woman. . . . I don’t even know how she looks.” District Attorney Bud Holmes grew frustrated and asked, “Bobby Ray Dixon, did you stand before this court in Hattiesburg and plead guilty to the murder?” Dixon conceded, “Yes, I pleaded guilty.” Holmes asked “and was it free and voluntary?” Dixon responded, “it wasn’t free and voluntary.” He concluded, “my mind comes and goes, and I don’t like to see nobody took away for nothing they ain’t done.” Dixon had been kicked in the head by a horse, and he suffered brain damage. Despite the weak case, the jury found Ruffin guilty and sentenced him to life in prison. Dixon and Bivens also received life sentences. Over the next three decades, one of them would die, and the other two would languish in prison before they could prove their innocence.²⁷

Racial tension was palpable in Hattiesburg throughout the Ruffin trial because during that same year, a black man began raping white women in the city, and many of his victims were white students at USM. The public grew terrified. All of the victims identified their attacker as a six-foot athletic black man, but none had seen his face. The rapes spurred some positive community responses. One of the few women on the HPD, Sergeant Jackie Sherrill, worked with counselors from USM and Forrest General to

²⁷ Quoting Campbell Robertson, “Thirty Years Later, Freedom in a Case with Tragedy for All Involved,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2010. *Bobby Ray Dixon, Phillip Bivens v. State of Mississippi* (2010), case no. CI 10-0147; *State of Mississippi v. Bobby Ray Dixon and Larry Ruffin* (1979), case no. 248/9380, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 6, 425; *State of Mississippi v. Larry Donnell Ruffin* (1979-2010), case no. 9513, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 466; *State of Mississippi v. Bobby Ray Dixon* (1980-2010), case no. 9784, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 6, 559; *State of Mississippi v. Phillip Bivens* (1980-2010) case no. 9764, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 553, all in Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Jerry Mitchell, “Dead Wrong,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 15, 2010.

establish a rape crisis center. But the rapes mostly spawned negative community responses as a frightened and enraged public pressured police to make an arrest. On February 17, 1983, police officers shocked the city and many across the nation when they arrested Don Horn, a popular 24-year-old football player at USM, and charged him with one of the rapes. Horn's teammates, coaches, and trainers along with his coworkers at Sunflower grocery insisted that he was innocent. Despite their belief in Horn, the athletic department was required to rescind his scholarship until, and unless, he was found innocent. Horn had planned to graduate in less than two months, and several professional teams had expressed interest in him. Black organizations rallied behind Horn. The Afro-American Cultural Society at USM worked in conjunction with the Forrest County branch of the NAACP to establish the Joe Horn Defense Fund. Horn's attorney, Jolly Matthews, defended him for paltry pay. In contrast to the response of the university and the black community, white Hattiesburg considered Horn guilty, in part, because the media coverage made him appear guilty. In light of the prejudicial coverage, Jolly moved for and received a change of venue for Horn's trial.²⁸

In late November, County Attorney Glen White tried Horn before an all-white sequestered jury in the Mississippi Coast town of Biloxi, 90 miles south of Hattiesburg.

²⁸ Janet Braswell, "Police Investigate Abduction, Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1982; "City, County Team Investigates Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, March 17, 1982; Janet Braswell, "Judge Sets," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 1983; Janet Braswell, "Westside Rapist Still Sought," *Hattiesburg American*, February 20, 1983; *State of Mississippi v. Don Horn* (1983), case no. 10,550, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 7, 209, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg; Chuck Abadie, "Support for Horn Remains After Arrest," *Hattiesburg American*, February 20, 1983; Janet Braswell, "USM Group Builds Horn Defense Fund," *Hattiesburg American*, February 24, 1983; Janet Braswell, "Horn Bond is \$50,000," *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Horn Jury Selection delayed," *Hattiesburg American*, November 29, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Horn Defense Attorneys File Motion for Change of Venue," *Hattiesburg American*, November 18, 1983.

White presented a weak case, and the defense easily proved that the physical evidence in the case not only failed to implicate Horn, but exonerated him. Not a single fingerprint or hair sample found at the crime scene matched Horn. The prosecution rested its case on testimony by an uncertified odontologist and forensic dentist who claimed that they matched photographs of the bite marks on the victim to a mold of Horn's teeth. In contrast, the defense's certified odontologist insisted that the bite marks were inconsistent. On the stand, Horn declared his innocence and insisted that he had spent the night with his girlfriend on the night of the rape, a fact his girlfriend confirmed during her testimony. Horn also pointed out that the victim continued to visit with him at Sunflower grocery after her rape, which the victim and Sunflower employees verified during their testimonies. The all-white jury deliberated for under three hours before finding Horn not guilty. After Horn's acquittal, President Lucas pledged to readmit him on his full-scholarship to USM whenever he wished to return. Horn wanted to complete his degree; however, he worried about returning to Hattiesburg "because of the frightening experience I got out of being just totally innocent. I don't want this to happen again."²⁹

However, some whites still feared Horn and considered him guilty. The rapes had continued in the wake of Horn's arrest and prosecution. The newspapers dubbed the attacker, who had raped 22 women by early 1984, the Westside rapist. In the spring,

²⁹ Quoting Betty Mallett, "Horn Unsure on Continuing his Education at Southern," *Hattiesburg American*, December 7, 1983. Betty Mallett, "Victim Compared Horn to Rapist, Cop Testifies," *Hattiesburg American*, November 30, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Dentist Allowed to Testify," *Hattiesburg American*, December 1, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Horn Found Innocent," *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Dentist Testimony Links Bite Mark to Don Horn," *Hattiesburg American*, December 2, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Experts in Horn Case Conflict," *Hattiesburg American*, December 3, 1983; Betty Mallett, "Victim Compared Horn to Rapist, Cop Testifies," *Hattiesburg American*, November 30, 1983.

police arrested Robert Lee White, Jr. who confessed to the rapes. Later, White claimed that he only confessed because police threatened to kill him. Over the next year, Glen White, who had risen from county prosecutor to district attorney, tried White in three separate trials for three of the nearly 22 rapes. In at least one of the cases, police matched linked latent finger and palm prints from the crime scene to White. During the racially-charged trials, one of the victims testified that while the attacker raped her, he told her that he hated white people. All-white juries in each of the three cases found White guilty. Judge McKenzie sentenced White to a series of life sentences. After the final conviction, the *Hattiesburg American* editors lauded the HPD and the district attorney's officer for diligently pursuing the rape cases after the acquittal of Horn and convicting the actual rapist. Still, the editors emphasized that Horn was the forgotten tragedy in the case because it had ruined Horn's reputation.³⁰

Racial prejudice had influenced the arrest and prosecution of Horn because police

³⁰ Janet Braswell, "Officials: 'Westside Rapist May Be 3 Different People,'" *Hattiesburg American*, December 7, 1983; Betty Mallett, "White Denies Freely Talking of Rape Case," *Hattiesburg American*, June 20, 1984; Betty Mallett, "Jury Watches Tape of Rape Suspect's Confession," *Hattiesburg American*, June 21, 1984; Betty Mallett, "Closing Arguments Begin in Rape Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, July 22, 1984; Betty Mallett, "White's Rape Trial Begins," *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 1985; Betty Mallett, "Prosecution to Finish Case," *Hattiesburg American*, September 26, 1984; Betty Mallett, "White Gets Life Sentence," *Hattiesburg American*, September 27, 1984; Betty Mallett, "Mother, Son Testify," *Hattiesburg American*, June 25, 1985; Betty Mallett, "Brandon Jury Finds Robert White Guilty of Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, June 26, 1985. *State of Mississippi v. Robert James Washington* (1977), case no. 8848, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 6, 247, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg. *Mississippi v. Robert Lee White* (1984), case no. 11,220; *State of Mississippi v. White* (1984), case no. 11230; *State of Mississippi v. White* (1984) case no. 11250; *State of Mississippi v. White*, case no. 11253 (1984); *State of Mississippi v. White* (1984), case nos. 11252-11262, all in *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 7, 435, 442-446, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg. Editorial, "The Tragedy of Westside Rapist Case," *Hattiesburg American*, July 1, 1985; Record of Robert White, MDOC #49113, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

had no physical or circumstantial evidence linking him to the crime. He became a suspect because he shared two physical features with the rapist—he was black, and he had an athletic build. Moreover, it was odd that in Horn’s trial and all three of White’s trials, not a single black person was selected to serve on the juries. Still, Horn’s exoneration and the white support from those who knew him at Southern Miss and at his job at Sunflower grocery, at the least, showed that Hattiesburg had come a long way from its white tyranny heydays; after all, in 1946 lynch mobs had surrounded the Forrest County courthouse as an all-white jury convicted and sentenced to death Willie McGee for raping a white woman despite the evidence that they were lovers. Although racism still thrived in the HPD during Horn’s case, changes were also transpiring across law enforcement agencies.

Some significant shifts away from racist policing emerged in county law enforcement under Billy McGee. In 1975, McGee applied for positions with the Mississippi Highway Patrol and the HPD, but because both institutions remained under affirmative action orders and could not hire white officers until they met the black quota, he took a part-time job as a deputy, and he ran for constable of a biracial district that included Palmers Crossing and the residential area near USM. As the youngest candidate in the four-man race with virtually no campaign funds, he campaigned door-to-door in black and white neighborhoods. After a run-off, McGee won the election. McGee brought to his position sensitivity toward racial justice that his predecessors lacked. McGee had graduated in the first integrated class at Blair High School, and he had fostered friendships with some of his black classmates, including Johnny DuPree and Kenneth Fairley. During the Movement years, his father had served as a deputy-sheriff, and he spoke with anger to his family about the Klansmen who had gone free in the

Vernon Dahmer murder and the ugly circumstances of police brutality that surrounded the homicide of Constable Cotton Humphrey in the Cloudies Shinall case in Palmers Crossing. As McGee prepared to assume his beat, which included Palmers' Crossing, he vowed to treat citizens equally.³¹

McGee perceived the cultivation of personal relationships as the most vital component of protecting his constituents. When people knew him and trusted him, they helped him fight crime because they understood that he wanted to protect them rather oppress them. To build that trust, McGee acquainted himself with as many people in his district as possible, and he treated them with respect. He fostered important relationships with a black woman, "Miss Louise," who ran the post office, and the owners of all the nightclubs. When he needed to find suspects, "Miss Louise" provided him with their addresses and directions to their residences. He met with a black deputy regularly in the black nightclubs, particularly the largest club, the High Hat, so he could observe the scene, prevent crime, and promote trusting relationships with the owners and employees. Consequently, he could rely on them when he needed information in an investigation. McGee became so popular that his constituents reelected him for four more terms, and many blacks credited him with instigating progressive changes in county law enforcement.³²

Racial shifts also transpired in the HPD in the 1980s when the veteran officers began retiring, and the younger more educated officers received promotions. During the

³¹ Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview, May 13, 2009; Fred Burns, May 12, 2009, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

³² Quoting Billy McGee, interview. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009.

1980s, Chief John Quincy Adams and later Chief Keith Oubre laid the foundation for a more professional, educated, and enlightened police force. Both chiefs understood that all men harbored certain prejudices, and the chiefs could not “order their heart,” but they could demand that every officer act in accordance with the HPD’s professional codes of conduct while on duty. Several law enforcement officials, including Constable McGee, considered Oubre the first true professional chief. Oubre stressed that officers were “public servants,” and, as such, they were responsible for protecting and helping the citizenry no matter how minor the need. To professionalize his force, Oubre initiated the first police training academy in Hattiesburg.³³

However, Oubre’s promotional policies, which eschewed affirmative action decrees, created controversy. Under the 1975 consent decree order, the chief was expected to promote African Americans aggressively and to ensure the presence of black officers in every sector of the HPD. According to a white officer, Charlie Sims, who joined the force in the early 1980s, the decree exacerbated racial tensions and prevented unity in the department because white officers resented the affirmative action plan. Oubre’s career development programs required all officers to undergo the same assessments and exams, and he promoted based on performance. Sims observed that the new program defused white resentment and facilitated unity in the department. Afterward, camaraderie in the department improved, and black and white officers began socializing outside of work. Nevertheless, under Oubre, the HPD rarely promoted black officers, which angered the black community. Furthermore, according to Fairley, the

³³ First quote, Wayne Landers, interview; second quote, Billy McGee, interview. Charlie Sims, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2009, MOHP recording.

HPD still harbored some racist and brutal officers, and few blacks trusted the department.³⁴

Similarly, few blacks trusted their white-dominated city halls in Laurel and Hattiesburg. Since Vernon Dahmer's murder in 1966, blacks in Hattiesburg had lobbied city fathers to address infrastructure problems in black neighborhoods and had implored them to fight racial discrimination in the schools and workforce. The city fathers had responded with negligible reforms. In the fall of 1980, a group calling itself the Black Community petitioned Mayor Bobby Chain to comply with its requests to improve infrastructure and flood control, remove dilapidated buildings and abandoned vehicles, provide adequate drainage systems, eradicate discriminatory policies in the schools, and develop recreational programs in black neighborhoods. Blacks also requested Mayor Chain to attack employment discrimination in the city by hiring blacks to fill top administrative positions. City leaders ignored the demands.³⁵

Blacks had long understood that until they shared political power with whites, they would never become first-class citizens with equal rights and opportunities. Lawsuits against the fire and police departments would have little effect until blacks had the political power to diversify the department heads and staff and to pass laws and ordinances that included and protected black interests. Whites understood that too. Although the Movement forced whites to concede ground, and for example, to allow blacks to vote, the Movement failed to instill racial equality. As long as whites retained

³⁴ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Charlie Sims, interview; Wayne Landers, interview.

³⁵ Black Community to Bobby Chain, November 27, 1980; Joe Rigsby to Bobby Chain, January 6, 1981, HMR.

power over the political system, they would perpetuate a two-tiered white supremacist system in which blacks would forever remain second-class citizens with some basic rights, but no power. To ensure black exclusion from power on the state and federal level after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Mississippi, like other southern states, diluted the black vote and undermined efforts to elect black representatives to the state legislature and to the U. S. Congress by creating multimember districts: they either combined districts countywide or combined multi-county districts to ensure a white majority; and each of these districts voted for two or more representatives. Blacks would never be elected unless the state shifted to single-member districts used in non-southern states: counties were subdivided into smaller districts based on precincts, and each district elected a single representative. In 1966 the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO), the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and the Lawyers of the Constitutional Defense Committee (LCDC) launched the first phase of a lawsuit against the state's discriminatory districting. They selected Peggy Jean Connor, whom they referred to as "the lady from Hattiesburg," as the lead plaintiff.³⁶

When the case *Connor v. Johnson* first came to court in 1966, Southern District Court Justices J. P. Coleman, Harold Cox, and Dan M. Russell, Jr. dismissed it on the grounds that the Constitution never entitled blacks to black representation and that the plaintiffs had failed to prove that redistricting posed a discriminatory intent or effect. Connor appealed. *Connor* suffered through 14 years of litigation and came before the

³⁶ Quoting Edward Grobow Redlich, "Toward Equal Representation: The Connor Case and the Struggle for Reapportionment of the Mississippi Legislature," (B.A. honors thesis, Harvard College, 1981), 41-43. Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi After 1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 61-63, 85-86, 102.

Supreme Court on nine occasions. Although in a series of rulings, the justices ordered Mississippi to design single-member districts, through appeals and apathy, Mississippi avoided compliance. Moreover, in 1976, after the Supreme Court ordered the state to implement immediately a state-wide plan for single-member districts, the legislature and the district court diluted the black vote again by dividing black-dominated precincts and submerging them in white-dominated districts. The *Connor* case entered its second phase as the plaintiffs demanded that the state terminate the racial gerrymandering of single-member districts. Finally in 1979, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. Still, the state continued to overtly employ racial gerrymandering of its congressional lines for the U. S. Congress until 1981 when the Department of Justice approved a new plan, which ultimately forced the state legislature to terminate its racial gerrymandering practices. Over the next decade, the *Connor* ruling led to a rise in the election of black officials. In 1979 Hattiesburg resident Percy Watson became the first African American to represent Forrest County in the Mississippi State Legislature.³⁷

Despite these victories, racial exclusion in politics persisted at the municipal and county levels, which forced blacks to launch new campaigns to acquire political power in their towns and counties. Most Mississippi cities, including Laurel and Hattiesburg, held at-large elections for commissioners, rather than single-district elections. Because whites predominated in Hattiesburg by a margin of 70.9 to 28.8 percent and in Laurel by 60.5 to

³⁷ Parker, *Black Votes Count*, 86-129, 199-205; Peggy J. Connor et al. v. Cliff Finch et al., and United States of America, Plaintiff–Intervenor, Civ. A. No. 3830(A) United States District Court, Southern District of Mississippi, Jackson Division, 419 F. Supp. 1072; 1976 U. S. Dist. LEXIS 13515; Jere Nash and Andy Taggart, *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 104-110; Percy W. Watson, Mississippi House of Representative, Mississippi State Legislature, <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/members/house/watson.xml>

30.5 percent, the white vote diluted black ballots and prevented the election of black commissioners. The *Connor* case lacked coverage over such practices, so blacks launched a local campaign to demand a political voice in city politics. In 1977, as *Connor* continued to work its way through the courts, the Forrest County NAACP took the lead in protesting black exclusion in Hattiesburg when it demanded that the city adopt a single-member district voting system, in which each district, rather than the city as a whole, elected representatives in a mayor-council system. When the white city leadership ignored the request, NAACP members James L. Boykins, Charles Phillips, and Henry McFarlin employed a two-pronged strategy to force the shift. They formed a biracial group that circulated petitions to include on the 1979 ballot a referendum that would change the mayor-commissioner to a mayor-council government, and they hired a white lawyer, Elliott Andalman, to sue the city in federal court. During the referendum campaign, blacks referred to the mayor-commissioner form of government as “taxation without representation.” By 1979 they had received enough signatures to place the referendum on the ballot.³⁸

White leaders mobilized white citizens against the referendum by appealing to racist sentiment without using blatant white supremacist rhetoric. Instead, as white civil

³⁸ Quoting Henry Naylor, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recording. Carol Welker, “Hattiesburg Lawsuit Still Unsettled,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM; *James L. Boykins, Charles Phillips, and Henry McFarlin Jr., v. City of Hattiesburg et al.* (1980), case no. H77-0062 (C), HMR, *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1980)]. *James L. Boykins, Charlie Phillips, and Henry McFarland v. City of Hattiesburg* (1977), case No. H77-062(N), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as, *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1977)]. For Laurel, see, Laurence Hilliard, “Laurel Elections Subject of Suit,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 21, 1983.

rights activist Jerry Himmelstein noted, they used “code words” including “dissension,” “sectionalism,” “federal government intervention,” and “outsiders.” During the 1950s and 1960s, white supremacists had used these words accompanied by racist demagoguery in their attempt to destroy the Movement: they had portrayed it as a communist plot launched by outside agitators and supported by a socialistic federal government to cause racial dissension and incite national sectionalism which would reverse racial power and destroy the nation. In 1979 white leaders portrayed the referendum campaign as a threat to the harmonious mayor-commission form of government because council members would rule in the best interests of their constituents rather than the city at large, and the clashing of interests would cause city sectionalism and dissension that might lead to further federal encroachment. For example, Mayor Gerrard warned the public that “ward politics” would cause “dissension” and disrupt the “fine spirit of cooperation” under the current system. He also cautioned that if the referendum passed, when the city drew the new district lines, a single disgruntled person could initiate a lawsuit. White leaders avoided using racial words, but the white citizenry understood the message. Black council members would fight to advance the interests of their black constituents and force whites to concede some of their power and privilege. If whites resisted, the racial dissension would incite the federal government to intervene to enforce biracial rule at best, and black rule at worst. The referendum failed by a 2-1 margin even though most blacks voted in favor of the proposal. The black veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and the rising young activists coming of age in the post-civil rights era refused to capitulate to the new amorphous white supremacist enemy. So, they rose again to defeat a new, Janus-faced Leviathan by proceeding with the lawsuit against the city. It took

several years before the court ruled on the case.³⁹

During these battles in municipal politics, Forrest County NAACP leader J. C. Fairley and Jones County NAACP leaders Susie Ruffin and Arwilla Davidson led the charge against the at-large election system for county supervisors on the grounds that it violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, various federal statutes, and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments by diluting the black vote and denying black representation. They demanded that the county replace it with a single-district election system in which residents of separate wards would elect supervisors to represent them. The plaintiffs enjoyed the support of the *Laurel Leader-Call*, which criticized the exclusion of blacks and of non-elite whites from county government and predicted that the “system of the good old boys where the few rule . . . is dying a slow death.” After long court battles, federal judges ruled in the plaintiffs’ favor. During the 1983 election in Forrest County, one of the lead plaintiffs in the Hattiesburg municipal case, James Boykins, ran and defeated the popular white incumbent of beat four, J. A. P., Carter by 75 votes to become the first African American supervisor in Forrest County. In Jones County, Democratic candidate Jerome Wyatt became the first black supervisor and was pleasantly surprised to find that the white supervisors treated him with respect. Several of them even suggested that he serve as president of the board but then noted that the white

³⁹ Quoting Jerry Himelstein, “Rhetorical Continuities in the Politics of Race: The Closed Society Revisited,” *Southern Communications Journal*, 48 (1983): 158-162; *Ibid.*, 153-166. Carol Welker, “Hattiesburg Lawsuit Still Unsettled,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM; *Boykins, v. Hattiesburg* (1980); *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1977); Henry Naylor, interview.

community would find it unacceptable. Instead, they elected him vice president.⁴⁰

Amidst the county lawsuits, the NAACP prepared its municipal case. The NAACP retained lawyer Elliott Andalman put together a legal team of attorneys from the South Mississippi Legal Services founded by his wife Martha Bergmark, which included Charles Lawrence, who was an USM alumnus, a recent Howard Law School graduate, and the Vice President of the Forrest County NAACP. In September 1980, Andalman argued before Judge John M. Roper that the mayor-commission form of government violated the U. S. Constitution and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because when the city established the commission form in 1910 via referendum, whites prohibited blacks from voting. Nearly three years passed, and the judge still neglected to render a decision. While blacks awaited the ruling, they lobbied for white support in the local newspaper. In an essay in the *Hattiesburg American*, Lawrence argued that at-large elections usually resulted in politicians selected by majority white constituents. Consequently, their

⁴⁰ Quoting Editorial, "Redrawing of Lines," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 29, 1983. Jerome Wyatt, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 21, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 986, MOHP; *J. C. Fairley et al. v. Joe T. Patterson, et al.* (1967), case no. H2205 (C),), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; "Negroes Seek Order," *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1967; Virginia Woodward, "Voter Registration," *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 1973; Ben Lee, "Forrest County's Plan for Reapportionment Rejected," *Hattiesburg American*, April 25, 1978; Ben Lee, "County Won't Appeal" *Hattiesburg American*, April 27, 1978; Jo Lauren Davis and Ken Pilarski, "Boykins First Black Supervisor," *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 1983; *Jones County Local Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Susie Ruffin, Jones County Improvement Association and Arwillia Davidson v. Jones County et al.* (1983), case no. H83-0200(R), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Katie Smith, "Judge Sets Aside Election," *Hattiesburg American*, July 27, 1983; Editorials, "Fair To Everyone?" *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 22, 1983; *Board of Supervisor Minutes*, March 1984 Term, vol. 38, 00356-00357, Chancery Clerk's Office, Laurel, Mississippi; Dana Gower, "Accord Sealed in Redistricting," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 9, 1983; Dana Gower, "Black Captures Seat," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 14, 1984.

political survival rendered them responsible to the majority constituency and not the minority. A council system would bring racial balance to municipal governance, as black majority districts would elect black council members, who would not only live in predominantly black wards and accordingly possess personal sensitivity to the needs of their neighbors, but they would remain accessible to them. If whites still failed to understand his perspective, he requested that they try living “on the other side of the tracks.”⁴¹

Laurel blacks followed Hattiesburg’s lead. On November 8, 1982, two African Americans, Marzell Clayton and George Miller, retained the Andalman team to file a class action lawsuit against their municipality on the grounds that its at-large election violated the Fifteenth Amendment and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by diluting intentionally the black vote to prevent black participation in government. Department of Justice lawyers, who joined the lawsuit, argued that blacks had suffered from a “long history of discrimination” in Laurel, and the mistreatment continued into the 1980s. Since the municipality had failed to appoint or hire blacks to top city positions, all-white officials allotted most of the city budget and federal monies for public works to white communities. Not surprisingly, black neighborhoods lacked street lights and suffered from insufficient and poor street paving and water control. In addition, white officials “shortchanged” black neighborhoods on city services and public safety protection. They

⁴¹ Quoting Charles Lawrence, Jr., “Minority Seeking Input,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1984. Charles Lawrence, Jr., interview; Carol Welker, “Hattiesburg Lawsuit Still Unsettled,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1980), HMR; *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1977); Henry Naylor, interview; Elliott Andalman, attorney profile, Andalman & Flynn, Attorneys at Law http://www.andalmanflynn.com/profiles/elliott_andalman/experience (accessed October 2010).

concluded that to provide blacks with equal access to the municipal government, the city must shift to a single-district system and develop at least one majority black district.⁴²

The local struggles in Laurel and Hattiesburg became intertwined with developments on a national level when, in the early 1980s, the U. S. Congress began debating the renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was scheduled to expire in 1982. The act had served as the cornerstone argument of the Laurel and Hattiesburg cases. Several Mississippi politicians opposed the renewal of the act, including Governor William Winter and Senator John Stennis. They contended that it had achieved its intended goal and the federal government should not treat the South differently than the rest of the American states. Stennis emphasized that Mississippi included blacks in the political process more than any other state. After all, 72.2 percent of blacks registered to vote in 1980 compared to the national average of 60 percent, and in 1980 Mississippi had elected 380 black officials, the largest number of any state in the Union. Although Stennis underscored these statistics to reveal great changes in Mississippi, he referred to the era of the Voting Rights Act as “the second carpet bagging.” Despite Mississippi’s resistance, the U. S. Congress passed, and President Ronald Reagan signed, a 25-year extension of the act. The renewal of the act greatly aided the Hattiesburg and Laurel lawsuits because the extension included an amendment that decreed that plaintiffs no longer had to prove “intent to discriminate” but only that the election system had a

⁴² Quoting Laurence Hilliard, “Laurel Elections Subject of Suit,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 21, 1983, Laurel Vertical File, McCain, USM. *Marzell Clayton and George Miller et al. and the United States v. City of Laurel et al.* (1982), case no. H-82-202(R), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Clayton v. Laurel* (1982)]; James R. Stanton, “Suit Asks Change in Laurel City Government Form,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 15, 1982; Karen McPherson, “Government Joins Lawsuit Against City,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 21, 1983.

discriminatory impact. The amendment rendered it far easier to challenge the exclusion of blacks in the at-large election system. In March 1983, civil rights lawyers, armed with the much stronger Voting Rights Act, convinced Judge Roper to hear their amended case.⁴³

When the municipal case in Hattiesburg came to trial in February 1984, the Andalman team presented voluminous evidence proving that the majority of Hattiesburg citizens voted for candidates based on their race rather than their merits. Since Hattiesburg whites comprised 73 percent of the population, black candidates never won elections. The all-white municipal government ignored grievances in the black community by neglecting to appoint blacks to commissions and boards or include them in municipal decisions and policy developments. City Commissioner W. U. Sigler even testified that he knew nothing about the NAACP's endorsement of a mayor-council form of government and cared nothing about the desires of the organization. A white citizen, Dale Molesworth, testified for the plaintiffs that whites voted in favor of the referendum to sustain the mayor-commission form of government because they hoped to prevent black candidates from winning elections. During the 1979 referendum campaign, Molesworth had attended a mayoral forum at which Mayor A. L. Gerrard had responded

⁴³ Quoting Senator John Stennis, Senate Floor Statement June 12, 1982, re: Voting Rights Act Should Be Extended, Ser. 33, John C. Stennis Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University, Starkville. David Mould, "Winter Calls for Abolishing Voting Rights Act," n. d., William Winter, Record Group 27, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Parker, *Black Votes Count*, 207; Carol Welker, "Hattiesburg Lawsuit Still Unsettled," *Hattiesburg American*, January 29, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM.

affirmatively when a white attendee asked Gerrard if the proposal was “really just to get the niggers on the city commission.”⁴⁴

On February 29, Judge Roper delivered a landmark decision when he ruled that the current mayor-commission government diluted black voting strength and prevented black representation in city government in violation of the Voting Rights Act. He ordered city leaders to dissolve the commission form of government and called both parties to submit for his approval a proposal for the new districts under a mayor-council governing body. Judge Roper speculated that many Hattiesburg citizens would likely consider his ruling federal encroachment, but he hoped that they would embrace the opportunity to “finally and forever eradicate both past and present vestiges of racial discrimination and seek a new beginning in race relations.” He tried to persuade whites to view the case from the black perspective by arguing, “if the situation were reversed, and the now majority white population of the city comprised only one-third of the electorate, would not the white community be seeking in this court the same type relief now requested by the black community? It is the hope of this court that one day the voters of this country, both black and white, will judge a candidate by his qualifications and not by the color of his skin.”⁴⁵

Whites in Hattiesburg responded ambivalently to the decision, but the city had no choice but to comply with the judge’s ruling. By the end of 1984, Hattiesburg had

⁴⁴ Quoting Testimony of Dale Molesworth, *Boykins, v. Hattiesburg* (1980), HMR. Nathan Jordan, “New City Government Ordered,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 3, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM; Opinion, *Boykins, v. Hattiesburg* (1980), HMR.

⁴⁵ Quoting Opinion, *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1980), 40-41, HMR. *Boykins v. Hattiesburg* (1977); Nathan Jordan, “New City Government Ordered,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 3, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM.

adopted the mayor-council form of government in which each district elected a council member. The editors of the *Hattiesburg American* applauded the change. However, many white citizens showed their disdain for the prospect of black leadership by seeking to remove their neighborhoods from inclusion in black wards. During the May 9 hearing to approve city council lines, white citizens packed the courthouse. Thames area residents, led by James Gladden, contested the new ward five boundaries that would place them in a majority black district. USM Professor William Scarborough argued that the court should place his white community into ward three rather than ward five because residents in his neighborhood, comprised mainly of single family homes, identified more with inhabitants of that ward. The city and the judge developed new wards that incorporated these proposals and created three predominantly white and two predominantly black districts. The black plaintiffs accepted the changes probably because they perceived that the loss of white population in their wards would provide them with a more dominant black voice.⁴⁶

The ruling in Hattiesburg had a domino affect. On August 3, Judge Roper ordered Laurel to establish a mayor-council governing body, and the city worked with the NAACP to create three black and four white majority districts. Many new hopeful politicians rushed to announce their candidacy for office in Laurel. In the spring of 1985, nine people ran for mayor and 32 candidates ran for city council. Incumbent Democratic Mayor Henry Bucklew was among the contenders. Bucklew had returned to the mayor's

⁴⁶ Quoting "Council Plan Could be Good for Hattiesburg," April 12, 1984, *Hattiesburg American*, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. Resolution of the City of Hattiesburg, April 10, 1984, HMR; Ordinance no. 2169, the City of Hattiesburg, December 27, 1984, Office of City Clerk, City Hall, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Nathan Johnson, "Judge Gives Approval to City Ward Changes," *Hattiesburg American*, May 19, 1984, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM.

office with a controversial past. While serving as mayor in the mid-sixties, the district court had convicted Bucklew of embezzlement and removed him from office, but the Mississippi Supreme Court later overturned the conviction, which allowed Bucklew to return to office. Bucklew's tenure in the 1980s became mired in controversy over the use of city monies. Still a consummate politician, Bucklew was determined to defeat his challengers. However, he underestimated the desire for change among the Laurel citizenry. He lost the Democratic primary in a run-off election to Richard Martin, primarily because he lost the black vote.⁴⁷

On May 15, 1985, Democratic primaries in Laurel broke color and gender barriers when a black retired insurance agent, George Gaddy, and a black sales executive, Lula Cooley, defeated their Democratic opponents, and neither faced a Republican challenger in the general election. During the June general election, black Democratic nominee for ward seven, Viola Malone, defeated her Republican opponent. Some blacks, including Melvin Mack, ran in predominantly white wards but lost. The black vote also failed to turn the tide of the election toward Martin, the Democratic candidate for mayor. Although Martin won all three black wards, Republican Sam Lindsey III won in a landslide because of a massive Republican turnout in the four white wards. Although Roy Moss, a white Democrat, defeated his Republican opponent, James Burnham, by 15 votes, white Republicans dominated the new government. In addition to the mayor, the three new council members—Fred Bush, Wayne Walters, and John Drennan—were

⁴⁷ *Clayton v. Laurel* (1982); Anthony Wheat, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010, MOHP recording; "Nine Run for Mayor, 32 for City Council," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 13, 1985; "James R. Stanton, "AG Waits on Offer Of Audit Settlement," *Hattiesburg American*, April 25, 1985; Editorial, "The Audit Cloud," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1985; James R. Stanton, "Lindsey, Martin Enjoying Victories," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 22, 1985.

white Republicans, and they all won their seats by large majorities. During Lindsey's inauguration, he challenged city leaders to embrace the new government that promised better representation for all its citizens.⁴⁸

The challenge was nearly overwhelming as the racial lines remained hard in Laurel, and the haunting memories of Jim Crow had yet to fade. Councilwoman Cooley never forgot the day that Laurel executed Willie McGee, how the "stillness fell all over the city" and the fear burned in the eyes of black elders. She could still recall with great clarity the image of the "colored" and "white" signs that excluded her; and she remembered with anguish the moment she learned that the Klan had murdered Vernon Dahmer. Still, because she had participated in the Movement, she had also known whites who had reached across the racial divides. When she won her council seat, she hoped to help build a biracial and harmonious governing body. However, she soon realized that most of the whites had no interest in sharing power as she and her black colleagues confronted a "good ole boys' syndrome." White men were still accustomed to blacks following their orders.⁴⁹

Even though blacks now had powerful positions, whites still dominated the government. Once again, whites sustained their supremacy because the white council

⁴⁸ James R. Stanton, "New Mayor, Council Takes Office," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 1, 1985; "Ward Five Bios," "Ward Six Bios," "Ward Seven Bios," all in *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 10, 1985; James R. Stanton, "Election Already Decided in Two of Seven City Wards," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 15, 1985; Lisa Easterling, "Lindsey Wins Mayor's Chair," *Hattiesburg American*, June 3, 1985; "Lindsey Set To Begin Transition," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 1985; James R. Stanton, "New Council Eyes Transition," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 1985; "Final Tally," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 1985; City Council meeting, July 2, 1985, *Mayor Board of Commissioners Minutes*, vol. 52, 294, Office of the City Clerk, Laurel City Hall, Mississippi.

⁴⁹ Quoting Lula Cooley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2010, MOHP recording.

members voted in racial blocs against the proposals of the black council members and prevented the integration of city boards. Even the sole white Democrat, Roy Moss, cast his lot with his white colleagues. Finally during one meeting, Cooley, the most outspoken of the black council members, shouted that “the day is gone when we have to do what the white man says.” Afterward, council meetings became mired in pitched battles, but the fights failed to produce change. The white councilmen often remained quiet when Cooley launched into an angry defense of some policy or in opposition to another; and then, they voted without taking into account her argument. They treated her views as rants that they were required to endure but not consider. Cooley grew particularly frustrated when she learned that the white councilmen held secret conferences before each council meeting so that they arrived as a unified front prepared to push through their policies. In response, Cooley, Malone, and Gaddy began holding private meetings. Finally, progress occurred as Moss grew more sensitive to black struggles and sometimes crossed racial lines to vote with his fellow Democrats.⁵⁰

During these turbulent years, Cooley pioneered efforts to increase the voice of blacks and women across the state when she helped found the Mississippi Black Caucus for Local Elected Officials (MBCLEO) and the Mississippi branch of Women in Municipal Government (WIMG). When city leaders met at the National League of Cities, MBCLEO and WIMG used their power as a voting bloc to force white male leaders to recognize the issues important to blacks and women across Mississippi. It also provided Cooley, Gaddy, and Malone with powerful contacts across the state, which strengthened their efforts to acquire state funds for their town and bolstered their power on the Laurel

⁵⁰ Quoting Lula Cooley, interview. City Council Meeting, July 2, 1985, *Mayor and Board of Commissioners Minutes*, vol. 52, 294.

council. Eventually, the black council members terminated the separate intraracial council conferences by creating integrated city council committees so that white and black council members met together to discuss issues that involved their committee. In addition, Cooley, Malone, and Gaddy opened council meetings to the public and held citizens forums throughout the year which forced white councilmen to retreat from their blatantly racist political style. Still, because whites dominated the council, city politics continued to favor the concerns of white residents.⁵¹

In Hattiesburg, no matter the outcome of the 1985 elections, whites would also dominate the new city government as only whites ran for mayor and only whites ran in three of the five wards. At least ward five was certain to have a black representative because the five Democrats, including lawyer Charles Lawrence and former attorney Douglass Baker, and Republican candidate Erwin Carr, a principal at Earl Travillion Attendance Center, were all African Americans. Although Baker was disbarred and imprisoned after his embezzlement conviction in 1973, Governor Winter had restored his civil rights through an executive order. In the other predominantly black district—ward two—a white Republican, Joe Sherrill, ran against several blacks, including Fred Burns, an army veteran, Eddie Holloway, a counselor at USM, and J. C. Fairley, a veteran civil rights leader and former Forrest County NAACP president.⁵²

⁵¹ Lula Cooley, interview; “About Us,” Mississippi Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, <http://www.mbcleo.org/f-owens>

⁵² Nathan Johnson, “Last Filing Day Draws 2 More in Council Race,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 13, 1985; “Ward 5 Race Guarantees Representation for Blacks,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 14, 1985; Charles Lawrence, interview; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2009 and April 28, 2010; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Eddie Holloway, interview; “Centennial Anniversary Homecoming,” booklet, April 27,

The rising young stars in the black community, including Johnny DuPree and Kenneth Fairley, supported Holloway. DuPree worked fulltime as Holloway's campaign manager, and the experience initiated his long career in public life. By 1985 Fairley had made his multi-million dollar fortune as a sports agent, and he invested his money in various business ventures, including a funeral home he inherited, an insurance company, and several real estate enterprises. He had also become the senior pastor of the ever-growing Mount Carmel Baptist Church. Fairley tried to use that power to persuade Burns to terminate his campaign, but to no avail. Still, Holloway was the favored candidate as he had great support from the Mobile-Bouie community. The community had helped rear Holloway as his mother had died when he was just 11-years-old and his father worked full time as a laborer at the Coastal Chemical Company. Although his father ordered him to stay away from Movement activities because he feared repercussions, Holloway had participated in a few of the civil rights protests, and he had absorbed the philosophy and passion of the Movement by reading every book he could obtain. During his college career at USM, Holloway studied sociology and management and became the first black residence hall manager, participated in student government, and excelled in his courses. He accepted every opportunity to mingle with students, faculty, and administrators and in doing so reached across racial boundaries. Along the way, he learned white cultural and governing systems and developed friendships and associations with influential people. Not surprisingly, he also had the support of many whites in his bid for the council seat, including white civil rights activist Jerry Himelstein, who encouraged Holloway to run because his likeability among whites made him the most viable black candidate for ward

1986, Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Nathan Johnson, "City's Hopefuls Ready for Runoff," *Hattiesburg American*, May 19, 1985.

two with its sizeable white population.⁵³

For the first time in Hattiesburg's history, the mayoral candidates—five white males—would also need to reach across racial lines to win the election. Black leaders and candidates for city council, with the exception of Republican candidate Ervin Carr, made it clear that the black community would most likely vote for a Democrat and choose the candidate who came into the black community and campaigned rather than sending his underlings. The Republicans sought to curry the vote of a class of rising black elites while Democrats focused on the black masses. After hard-fought primaries, incumbent Republican Mayor Bobby Chain faced Democratic challenger Commissioner G. D. Williamson in the general election. The *Hattiesburg American* endorsed Chain because he had advanced the Hub City economically, and he would provide continuity during the transition to the new mayor-city council government. Because blacks and working class whites who supported Williamson flocked to the polls, he won every precinct except one, and he dominated the vote in the black community. As a commissioner, Williamson had kept close to his constituents, particularly the lower classes, qualities that many blacks admired. Consequently, Williamson won.⁵⁴

The historic election also placed on the city council two black men, Lawrence and Holloway, and a white woman, Kathryn Cummings. Holloway and Lawrence won their

⁵³ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Eddie Holloway, interview; "Centennial Anniversary Homecoming," booklet.

⁵⁴ "G. D. Gets a Mandate," *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 1985; Editorial, "Williams Win Provides Opportunity," *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 1985; Nathan Johnson, "Black Vote Pivotal in Mayor's Race," *Hattiesburg American*, April 21, 1985; "It's Chain v. Williamson," *Hattiesburg American*, May 15, 1985; Editorial, "Mayor Chain Deserves Vote of Confidence," *Hattiesburg American*, May 26, 1985; Nathan Johnson, "New Council Offers Varied Skills," *Hattiesburg American*, June 7, 1985; Betty Mallett, "Minorities Feel They Have Chance," *Hattiesburg American*, June 8, 1985.

seats by large majorities. Holloway's win was particularly significant because 40 percent of his constituents were white, and only about two-thirds of the 60 percent black population voted. Burns was shocked and devastated when he came in last place. Reared in the Movement by a mother who was a stalwart NAACP member and CAA employee, Burns had spent his childhood surrounded by civil rights activists. Their stories and discussions had instilled in him a "service heart," and his military experience and his own work for the CAA had intensified his sense of devotion to a struggle larger than himself. From his professors at USM, he learned about the sociopolitical and historical structures that inhibited the rise of oppressed people, and he yearned to break the yolk that still restrained his community. Because he perceived himself as a man of the people and articulated his ideas with forthrightness, he approached the political arena without the usual guile of a politician. When he lost, he retreated from the public to contemplate his role in the racial struggle. He liked Holloway, but he considered his approach toward black uplift too cautious, and he found the black civil rights leadership wanting and the black community disconnected. Over the next year, he began formulating a plan to unify the community and launch a new movement. Burns was not alone in his discontent.⁵⁵

Still, on the eve of the inauguration of the new government, many blacks expressed great hope that the city had elected municipal leaders who would respond to the many grievances blacks had articulated since the civil rights era. Although the racial balance tipped toward whites, with three white council members and a white mayor, it also tipped toward Democrats as the mayor, the two black council members, and white council member Ed Morgan were all Democrats. Moreover, despite the racial divides in

⁵⁵ Quoting Fred Burns, interview, April 28, 2010. Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2009 and June 10, 2009.

the city and the philosophical differences between the parties, the mayor and council members had great respect for each other, and they formed a cohesive and an amicable government. On July 2, 1985, Mayor Williamson set the stage for interracial cooperation when he opened the first city council meeting in Hattiesburg by declaring the government shift as representative of a “a time of beginning, a new time, a more democratic process, a better form of government.” Holloway and Lawrence considered the new government a great success. To their pleasant surprise, when they expressed the grievances of the black community and fought for black interests, they found the mayor and the white council members receptive. Holloway and Lawrence were most successful in convincing the other council members and the mayor to improve the infrastructure in black neighborhoods. Soon, city departments began repairing streets and sewer lines, fixing problems with drainage, removing dilapidated housing, and clearing the clutter in abandoned lots. Of course, these changes took time, and many black citizens grew impatient as they expected their new black leaders to rectify inequities immediately.⁵⁶

Black patience wore thin when poor infrastructure in the black community led to a nearly tragic debacle. On a Sunday afternoon, February 15, 1987, a seven-year-old black boy, Malik Hathorn, fell into an open drainage ditch in the all-black Jerusalem community. Waters swept him into a metal culvert and pushed him 125 yards toward the Leaf River. Hathorn nearly drowned. The incident enraged residents in the black

⁵⁶ Quoting City Council Meeting, July 2, 1985, *City of Hattiesburg, City Hall Minute Book*, vol. 1985-3, 1, Office of City Clerk, City Hall, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. “Holloway: Ward 2, Margin a Mandate,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 1985; James O. Saxton, “Party ‘Came Through’ to Give Lawrence Victory Over Carr,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 1985; Nathan Johnson, “New City Government Inaugurated,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 1, 1985; Nikki Davis Maute, “Government Change Gave Blacks More influence,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 31, 2005; Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 30, 2008; Charles Lawrence, interview.

community, as they had spent decades complaining about the dangerous living conditions in their neighborhoods. During town meetings, residents conveyed to their leaders that they would no longer tolerate the poor drainage, the pathetic street lighting, the ditches crawling with snakes, the unpaved roads, and the water and waste that flowed hazardously into their neighborhoods. Juanita Bethley shouted that she had sent her five children off to school “across that ditch,” and she wanted to know exactly when the city planned to repair it. All the citizens had grown concerned about the snakes that crawled out of the ditch and slithered around their neighborhoods. Mamie Lee Phillips declared, “I’m sick of rattlers. . . They come streaking across my yard and my patio as [if] I’d called ‘em.”⁵⁷

The city leaders tried to placate the residents and begged for their patience. Director of Public Services Herlon Pierce claimed that the city had plans to install a pipe in the ditch that would more safely house the flowing waters, but it had stalled because of problems with building easements on private properties. Councilman Holloway argued that the city crews had improved their work in the Jerusalem community, but resident Lynn Jones responded that city workers just tossed disinfectant into the ditch instead of thoroughly sterilizing it. Alberta Anderson complained that when the crews sprayed the disinfectant, they sprayed right by her house, killing all her flowers. Besides, the smells from the ditches were noxious. Annie Magee pointed out that the ditch was paved on the white side of town, but when it reached Jerusalem “it’s mud . . . The water stands year round. It doesn’t drain. It’s there 365 days. . . There’s snakes. There’s mosquitoes.” Rod Woullard refused to accept “patch jobs” and suggested that the city use money budgeted

⁵⁷ Janet Braswell, “Holloway Feels Citizens’ Wrath,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 19, 1987, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM.

for white areas to fix it. Holloway insisted that changes took time as government moved slowly.⁵⁸

The city could not respond fast enough to the myriad of problems arising in the historically black communities throughout Hattiesburg. They decayed rapidly because the flight of whites and middle class blacks that began in the wake of integration and the 1974 flood had burgeoned into a mass exodus by the mid-eighties. Whites fled east to Petal, north to Sumrall, or west to predominantly white Lamar County, adjacent to Forrest. By 1993 whites dominated the Lamar County population at 90 percent while the white population in Hattiesburg declined to 58 percent. The flight of upper income residents greatly decreased city revenue. Most blacks moved west, but toward the university rather than outside of Hattiesburg. Many former residents left behind abandoned homes and lots. City code enforcement workers cited hundreds of properties as hazardous, and though city crews tore some down, many remained. Holloway implored the city to spend money on its dying core rather than millions on the newer areas away from downtown. He complained that the council managed to allot budgeting for infrastructure near the mall, but refused to spend it on historic neighborhoods. Despite Holloway's pleas, white city leaders generally neglected the historic black neighborhoods and the core of the old downtown for another decade.⁵⁹

The flight of the black middle class also fragmented the black community and destabilized the historically black neighborhoods. The Civil Rights Movement and the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Quoting Geoff Pender, "Older Part of Hub City Deteriorating," *Hattiesburg American*, August 1, 1993, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. Kelly Carson, "History Pushes Town West," *Hattiesburg American*, February 25, 1996, Hattiesburg History Vertical File, McCain, USM; Eddie Holloway, interview.

post-civil rights reconstruction provided unprecedented socioeconomic opportunities for professional and working class blacks, but it left behind unskilled black residents who lacked opportunities for training and education. When the job training programs of the War on Poverty vanished under fiscal conservative leadership of the 1970s and the 1980s, poor blacks faced perennial unemployment, and they became part of a black underclass consigned to a life of welfare and poverty in the decaying traditional black neighborhoods that turned into ghettos. Impoverished blacks suffered from “a culture of segregation”; segregated by race and by class, they became an isolated people abandoned in the decaying inner cities. The post-civil rights reconstruction began as a united race toward the Promised Land, but the economic shifts divided the beloved black community, and the racial battles denied even the black bourgeois entrance to America’s Eden.⁶⁰

Hattiesburg blacks certainly faced new challenges with the acquisition of political power for they had a voice but not a majority vote. Holloway was realistic about his opportunities and his obstacles. He sought to modify the system and make it more responsive to black needs. However, Holloway considered many black constituents as great a threat to progress as white racism because they fought his efforts to protect black neighborhoods from industrialization, commercialization, and dangerous building practices. During Jim Crow, the white city fathers had zoned Hattiesburg to permit liquor stores, juke joints, and industries anywhere in the black community but had prohibited them in white residential areas. In black neighborhoods, entrepreneurs built bars and liquor stores across from schools and churches, and they located factories that emitted

⁶⁰ Quoting Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 8. For other views of the making of the underclass, see, Katz, *The Underclass Debate*; William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land*; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.

hazardous chemicals in black areas. When Holloway pushed for ordinances to change zoning laws and to enforce laws that prevented non-licensed contractors from working on black homes, some blacks opposed him. They wanted to hire cheap contractors and open or patronize juke joints in their neighborhoods. Holloway argued that a rigged electrical line could cause fires, and juke joints and poorly built homes lowered the aesthetics and market value of neighborhoods. As he later lamented, many blacks suffered from a “failure to understand” the deleterious impact these practices and businesses had on the community. Long ago, white institutional racism had blinded African Americans to perceive these practices as acceptable. Until they raised their expectations, they would never liberate themselves from impoverished living conditions, and they would never achieve equality or acceptance. Holloway concluded that integration would fail until assimilation proceeded.⁶¹

A rising black leader, Reverend Arthur Siggers of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, disagreed with Holloway’s integrationist/assimilationist philosophy. Siggers argued that integration had many unintended negative consequences. It weakened black unity; it destroyed black capitalism; and it undermined black pride. Once blacks could acquire their needs from white-owned stores which had greater access to products, blacks generally stopped supporting black businesses. The core of the black community—the businesses such as those on Mobile-Bouie in Hattiesburg and Front Street in Laurel—vanished, divesting blacks of the social centers that united them, the vision of black success that bolstered black pride, and black economic autonomy. Siggers lamented that blacks had “sacrificed a whole community of businesses to eat at McDonalds with white

⁶¹ Quoting Eddie Holloway, interview. Terry L. Jones, “City Ward Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 8, 2008.

folk.” Thus, Siggers also opposed replicating zoning laws prevalent in white neighborhoods because most blacks could not afford to open a business in white commercial areas, but they could afford land or leases in the lower appraised areas in black neighborhoods. He worried about the death of black capitalism as he remarked, “if you control what somebody eats, you control them.”⁶²

Many blacks also worried about the white control over the administration of public schools. Hattiesburg had desegregated the secondary schools in a manner that privileged whites, and they had circumvented orders to desegregate its elementary schools. In 1984 Forrest County black residents, led by Andrew and Patricia Pittman in conjunction with the Department of Justice, brought a desegregation lawsuit in the name of the Pittman’s daughter, Zandra, against the Hattiesburg Municipal School District (HMSD). By the mid-eighties Bethune, Jones, Eureka, Grace Love, and Walthall elementary schools were 89 to 100 percent black. Whites dominated the population at Thames, Grace Christian, and Woodley schools at 90, 80, and 71 percent respectively. Only three schools, Eaton, Davis, and Camp, had integrated with student bodies ranging from 48 to 64 percent black.⁶³

In response to the Pittman lawsuit, Hattiesburg Superintendent Sam Spinks formed a biracial committee composed of seven blacks and seven whites who approved two different desegregation proposals for the United States Southern District Court to consider. The Department of Justice and the Pittmans supported the District Alternative

⁶² Quoting Arthur Siggers, interview.

⁶³ *United States of America v. Zandra Pittman, v. The State of Mississippi and Hattiesburg Municipal Separate School District* (1987), case no. 85-4804, United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth District, HMR, [hereafter cited as *US v. Pittman* (1987)]; Sam Spinks, interview by Charles Bolton, September 15, 1997, vol. 693, 27-30, MOHP.

Plan that would pair schools to force immediate desegregation. The Hattiesburg Municipal School District preferred the Magnet Plan that would convert Jones and Walthall into magnet schools and would admit an equal population of black and white students based on voluntary applications for acceptance. In addition, the district would combine Grace Love, a virtually all-black school, with Eaton, a racially mixed school, while Bethune and Eureka would remain basically all-black. Finally, the plan would change district zones to assure the reassignment of some black children to predominantly white schools and facilitate the improvement of facilities at historically black schools.⁶⁴

During the trial in October 1985, the Department of Justice switched sides to support the Hattiesburg Municipal District's magnet plan because it was the most likely plan to succeed. Members of the biracial committee also testified that they preferred the magnet plan, as the pairing plans would likely cause "white flight." U. S. District Judge Tom S. Lee accepted the magnet plan because the pairing plan would cause excessive bussing, and the magnet plan "will cause less white flight . . . all the while further desegregating the system and increasing interracial exposure." The black plaintiffs opposed his ruling and filed a series of appeals. Despite Judge Lee's efforts to keep whites in the school system by choosing the magnet over the pairing plan, whites fled the schools. By the 1985/1986 school year, the black student population had climbed to 58 percent and the white population had fallen to 42 percent. White flight steadily increased over the next decade.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *US v. Pittman* (1987); Ken Pilarski and Betty Mallet, "Judge to Hear Black Group's Motion," *Hattiesburg American*, July 17, 1984; Sam Spinks, interview, 26-30.

⁶⁵ Quoting *United States of America and Zandra Pitman et al. v. The State of Mississippi et al. and Hattiesburg Municipal Separate School District* (1985), case no.

During the early 1980s, school integration was also failing in Jones County. The Southern Railway tracks in Laurel had long separated whites and blacks into separate neighborhoods, and these areas continued their seven segregated elementary schools even after Laurel had complied with court orders in 1970 to desegregate their secondary schools. In 1975 several black plaintiffs filed a lawsuit to demand that the entire district desegregate. Many Laurel officials claimed that they opposed the order for non-racist reasons—it would require bussing, and it would force drivers to transport children over the busy railway lines. Judge Russell warned the white leaders that eventually the courts would force the pairing of elementary schools to achieve integration and suggested that they integrate immediately. Laurel neglected to act. In 1977 the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the Laurel district to pair elementary schools by the fall of 1978. On September 1, 1978, Laurel elementary schools desegregated without conflict. By that point, however, many of the more vocal white opponents had pulled their children out of city schools. White flight began with Russell’s warning in 1975, and by 1979 nearly 800 whites had fled the Laurel schools by moving to the county and sending their children to the predominantly white schools in the county district. The white exodus continued in the

4706, United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, Jackson Division, 622 F. Supp. 672, 1985 U. S. Dist. LEXIS 14734. *United States of America and Zandra Pitman et al. v. The State of Mississippi et al. and Hattiesburg Municipal Separate School District*, case no. 85-4804, United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 808 F. 2d 385; 1987 U. S. App. LEXIS 1364; Cathey O’Donnell, “Judge Rules Magnet Schools Best Desegregation Method,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 23, 1985; Tim Doherty, “Schools’ ‘White Flight’ More Than Forecast,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 15, 1987; Cathey O’Donnell, “School Officials Pleased With Court-Ordered Plan,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 23, 1985; J. Syd Connor, “Integration Speed-up Ordered,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1987.

1980s, and soon blacks dominated the student body. To the great frustration of many blacks, however, whites continued to dominate the school board and the administration.⁶⁶

Blacks in Hattiesburg also grew disgruntled with the lack of black power in their increasingly black-dominated schools. They grew outraged when the Hattiesburg school district fired Roscoe Pickett, the assistant principle of the local high school, which by the 1980s was commonly referred to as Hattiesburg High School rather than Blair High. Pickett had served as assistant principal of the high school when the districts integrated, and he had remained in the post ever since. Most blacks considered Pickett qualified for the position, and they expected the school administration to reflect more accurately the racial population of the school. Douglass Baker, who with the aid of white friends received a reinstatement of his license to practice law, convinced Pickett to sue the district. Reverend Fairley took a personal interest in the case. He attended several board meetings over the conflict and expressed great frustration with the board's treatment of Pickett. Superintendent Spinks resigned at the end of the 1985 school year, and Pickett settled his case under the new superintendent, Gordon Walker. The district hired Pickett as assistant principal for the 1985/1986 school year on the stipulation that he would reapply for the position ever year thereafter. Many blacks found the settlement insulting,

⁶⁶ "Laurel Schools Force to Start Mixing Classes," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 17, 1977, 2; Gordon Foster and the Miami Desegregation Assistance Center, "Hattiesburg Public Schools: A Report on the Implementation of the April 29, 1987 Order of the U. S. District Court and the Consent Decree approved by this Order," March 10, 1988, HMR; Charles Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 188-190; "Laurel City Schools Open Without a Hitch," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 1, 1978. For racial breakdown in Jones County and Laurel schools, see, Memorandum Opinion and Order, July 27, 1989, 5-6, in case file, *City of Laurel Board vs. Jones County School Board*, case no. 87-245, Transfer No. 021920367, Box No. 28, Location No. 10071973, NARA.

and they demanded that he receive a longer contract.⁶⁷ The battle over the schools had only just begun as the Second Reconstruction wound to a close.

Great changes had transpired during the 12 years of the Second Reconstruction in the Central Piney Woods, but racial unrest and inequity persisted. By the mid-eighties, blacks had won nearly every court battle, and yet the utopian dream of racial equality and reconciliation still eluded the Central Piney Woods. Blacks had achieved political power in the city councils and on the board of supervisors, but whites held the majority of seats and failed to respond comprehensively to black needs. African Americans served as police and firefighters, but whites were the captains and chiefs. Despite progressive changes in these departments, discrimination within the departments and toward black communities persisted. Because of white flight, blacks were the majority population in the schools, but whites still retained power over the administration. The Central Piney Woods had integrated its work force, its political halls, and many of its public spaces, but whites still controlled the venues.

Although African Americans generally perceived whites as their main obstacles to racial equity, some Hattiesburg blacks, including Fairley, Burns, Siggers, Woullard, and Baker, partially faulted black leaders too, as they perceived them as too conciliatory to white-controlled compromises. They had grown tired of gradual change, and they were leery of white motives. Not all of these men were friends, but all of them shared a similar philosophy that black leaders must aggressively confront whites to force equalization of black access to power and opportunity. They began to gravitate toward each other. In

⁶⁷ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Douglass T. Baker, interview; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; J. Syd Connor, "Sit-in Group Awaits Answer," *Hattiesburg American*, November 4, 1986.

Laurel, the black politicians, particularly Lula Cooley and George Gaddy, had taken an aggressive approach, and over the next decade they, along with activists like Manuel Jones and James Jones, intensified their efforts as the reconstruction era faded. In 1986 these determined black leaders built upon the gains of the Second Reconstruction to launch a Second Movement in the Central Piney Woods, defined by the revitalization of direct-action tactics and undergirded by a commitment to achieving black power—the power of blacks to control their social, political, and economic futures.

CHAPTER XII

GADFLIES: THE SECOND MOVEMENT

“For if you kill me, you will not easily find another such person at all, even if to say in a ludicrous way, attached on the city by the god, like on a large and well-bred horse, by its size and laziness both needing arousing by some gadfly.”¹ —Socrates

On a Friday afternoon in November 1986, a dozen black men led by Reverend Kenneth Fairley stormed into the Hattiesburg School District Administration Building and demanded to meet with white Superintendent Gordon Walker. When his assistants informed them that Walker would not return until Monday morning, they announced that they were the leaders of a new civil rights organization—Operation Children First—and they would stage a sleep-in until Walker granted them an audience. The men had grown tired of waiting for a proper response to their grievances, including the discriminatory treatment of black Assistant Principal Roscoe Pickett and the lack of African American power over the predominantly black public schools. Fairley tried to explain that the dearth of black administrators and faculty deprived students of black role models which “crippled our children’s minds.” It also harmed race relations, because as Pickett emphasized, “white students grow up without knowing that there are intelligent black males in this world.” Reverend Fairley had long been driven by his father’s mantra to “level the field of play,” and he determined it was high time to force the leveling.²

¹ Plato, “Apology,” in *Classic of Moral and Political Theory: Second Edition*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 14.

² First quote, J. Syd Conner, “Blacks Stage Sit-in Here,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 1986; second quote, J. Syd Conner, “Pickett Set to Resume HHS Post,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 11, 1986; last quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording,

Operation Children First was the first major black protest in the Central Piney Woods after the Movement era. Five black men—Reverend Fairley, Frederick Burns, Rod Woullard, Douglass Baker, and Reverend Arthur Siggers—decided the time had arrived for a renewed black uprising to rectify the inequities unresolved by the Civil Rights Movement and the post-civil rights struggle. Suffrage, black representation, and desegregation had supposedly provided blacks with an equal opportunity; but these men found that equal opportunity was not enough, and in many ways was simply a myth in a society and a nation constructed upon racial, social, and economic inequity. In the 16 years since school integration in Hattiesburg and Laurel, whites had steadily fled to the suburbs, yet they retained control over the increasingly predominantly black municipalities. The white-dominated city halls, city councils, school boards, school administrations, police forces, fire departments, chambers of commerce, and various city boards continued to neglect black needs and ignore black complaints. Armed with black power ideologies, the five men launched a Second Movement in Hattiesburg to demand an equalization of racial power in the life of the city.³

The Second Movement originated in Hattiesburg in the fall of 1986 and spread into Laurel and beyond the Central Piney Woods because its five leaders moved into

interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. Rod Woullard, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009, MOHP recording.

³ Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview, May 13, 2009; Douglass T. Baker, interview, September 24, 2008; Arthur Siggers, interview, June 10, 2009, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

adjacent counties when called upon to help organize black leadership and facilitate demonstrations. The Second Movement exacerbated divides in the black community, as the traditional black leadership perceived the revival of direct-action tactics and black power philosophies to be militant and ultimately detrimental to black progress and racial harmony. It also widened the racial abyss across the Central Piney Woods as it frightened and angered whites, and consequently, it accelerated white flight, which intensified the trend toward re-segregation. Still, it created a momentous positive development: it forced whites to open positions of authority to blacks and to respond to the grievances of black citizens.⁴

Weeks before the sleep-in, Burns and Fairley, at ages 33 and 32 respectively, birthed the Second Movement in Hattiesburg at Fairley's Mount Carmel Baptist Church on Mobile Street. Burns had far less economic and political clout than Fairley, but he had ideas, insight, passion, and a dogged determination to rescue the withering civil rights struggle from its course of fragmentation and disintegration. By the fall of 1986, Burns had grown frustrated by the sluggishness of black progress and the stagnant state of civil rights activism. The NAACP was the only major civil rights organization to survive the Civil Rights Movement in Forrest County, and it had lost power and momentum. The smattering of other black leaders from preachers to veteran activist lacked a united front, mass followers, and an organized program.⁵

⁴ Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview, May 13, 2009; Douglass T. Baker, interview, September 24, 2008; Arthur Siggers, interview, June 10, 2009; Eddie Holloway, interview, September 30, 2008; Charles Lawrence, interview, May 5, 2010, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

Determined to launch a second movement, Burns identified 20 significant black leaders in Hattiesburg and implored Reverend Fairley to help him bring them together. At the time, Burns harbored resentment toward Fairley because he had tried to force Burns out of the 1985 council race against Holloway. Still, because Fairley was a particularly important player in Hattiesburg, Burns considered the minister's leadership vital. As a multi-millionaire businessman, Fairley had contacts with the black and white bourgeois; and as the charismatic senior pastor of one of the fastest growing churches in the Hub City, Fairley had the power to mobilize a large segment of the black population into a daunting army of resistance. The determination that moved Fairley as a child to join the vanguard of black youths integrating all-white schools motivated him still, and he used his spiritual and economic pulpits to "level the field of play," whether that meant campaigning for black candidates or protesting racial discrimination. Fairley let Burns know that despite his wealth and prominence, his fealty remained with the "grassroots" people, and he would risk stature and prosperity for the dream of collective black power. Fairley and Burns invited 20 persons to a meeting at Mount Carmel Baptist Church.⁶

About 10 of the invited persons attended the meeting, including Reverend Siggers, Baker, Woullard, Reverend Clemon Ector, Councilman Charles Lawrence, Mississippi Representative Percy Watson, businessman Tommy Davis, Judge Tommy Williams, and NAACP leaders Jeanette Smith and Nathan Jordan. Soon after the meeting began, Burns focused the conversation on the schools, and most of the attendees agreed

⁵ Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009.

⁶ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interview May 13, 2009.

that the persistence of racial inequities in the schools was the dominant racial problem in Hattiesburg. During the 1985/1986 school year in the Hattiesburg district, blacks represented 58 percent of the student population; however, only one black person served on the five-member school board, and whites greatly outnumbered blacks in the administration and faculty. Baker and Fairley stressed that the white powers had purposefully avoided hiring and promoting black employees and emphasized the recent Pickett affair as an example. The district had refused to rehire him for the 1986/1987 school year. To demand shared power over the schools, the assembled activists formed Operation Children First.⁷

On October 7, Reverend Fairley delivered to Superintendent Walker and the Hattiesburg school board a list of demands on behalf of Operation Children First. To increase the power of the black voice in the schools, the superintendent and the board needed to hire black teachers and administrators, involve black students in more academic programs and extracurricular activities, allocate more contracts to black-owned companies, and use black recruiters to bring black employees to the schools. Fairley also insisted that they change the discipline policies because an inordinate number of black students showed up on the in-school suspension reports, and he requested that they terminate the practice of cross-grading, which joined several grades in one classroom. Walker and the board responded that they would investigate charges of racial imbalances between white and black students in academic and extracurricular activities. However,

⁷ Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Douglass T. Baker, interview; Sam Spinks, interview by Charles Bolton, September 15, 1997, MOHP Digital; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009. For black and white student population calculations for 1986, see Tim Doherty, "Schools' 'White Flight' More Than Forecast," *Hattiesburg American*, December 15, 1987.

they refuted many of the other complaints, and they claimed that they lacked the power or finances to resolve others. They insisted that the district had actively sought to recruit black professionals. Law prohibited them from ensuring set asides for minority companies because they had to hire the lowest bidder for business contracts. The district lacked the funds to terminate cross grading. Finally, they contended that the in-school suspension program had proved effective, and the district had a no-tolerance policy for misbehavior. They requested that Operation Children First aid the district in improving discipline in the classrooms by working with the community and parents.⁸

Operation Children First members considered the response an evasion. Fairley sent a letter to Walker, insisting that he implement all of their demands and rehire Pickett immediately. When Walker responded in a 17-page letter that reiterated the original response, Operation Children First members revived the Civil Rights Movement's direct action tactics and held a six-day sleep-in at the Hattiesburg Public School Offices in downtown. Longtime NAACP activist and participant in Operation Children First Jeanette Smith wanted to participate in the sleep-in, but the men denied her request. Despite the chauvinistic snub, Smith joined the masses of black women who supported the sleep-in by cooking and delivering food to the all-male participants, and she joined the picket lines that formed in front of the administration building during the days. To publicize the protest, the activists contacted local media outlets and reporters from the

⁸ Hattiesburg School Board Minutes, October 7, 1986, October 20, 1986, *Hattiesburg School District Minute Book*, vol. 2, Hattiesburg Municipal School District, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as HMSD].

Associated Press, who rushed to downtown Hattiesburg to cover the story.⁹

The superintendent's office responded to the negative publicity by sending Assistant Superintendent Jimmy Hopkins, an African American, to meet with the black leaders. During the meeting, Burns and Fairley realized that Hopkins had been sent to pacify them not to negotiate. The school board had no intention of meeting with them. Frustrated, Burns told reporters, "It's a waste of time. If this can't be negotiated, we'll have to take more radical steps. If we have to look into sanctions, we'll do that." When Burns saw a white board member outside the administration building, he rushed toward him and shouted, "Why won't you meet with us? Those are our children. We love our children." Burns' appeal moved the board member, and he persuaded the others to meet with the group. Over the next several days as the sleep-in continued, Operation Children First leaders met individually with school board members, but they reached an impasse when the board tried to hold closed door meetings that excluded the activists.¹⁰

These preliminary meetings allowed Burns the opportunity to study and analyze the opposition. One morning, Burns informed Fairley that "we will not be successful until we make the Star Chamber come out." Burns was referring to the white elites in Hattiesburg who, like royal advisors in the Tudor epoch, had always controlled the

⁹ Kenneth Fairley to Gordon Walker, October 29, 1986, *Hattiesburg School District Minute Book*, vol. 2, HMSD; Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; J. Syd Connor, "Blacks Stage Sit-in Here," *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 1985; "Group's Demands Include More Recruiters, No Fee," *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 1985; J. Syd Connor, "Sit-in Group Awaits Answer," *Hattiesburg American*, November 4, 1986; M. E. Williams, "City Forges Biracial Committee," *Hattiesburg American*, December 12, 1986; Douglass T. Baker, interview; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

¹⁰ First quote, "Blacks Stage Sit-in Here," *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 2009; second quote, Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, May 8, 2009.

politics of the town. Only a smattering of them, including Moran Pope, Bobby Chain, and Jimmy Dukes, had held political office, but they all possessed the wealth and power to control most politicians, board members, and the chamber of commerce. Although many of them were from old money families, Chain and Dukes came from ordinary circumstances. Chain had made his fortune in the electric business. Dukes acquired power as a county attorney and wealth as a private defense lawyer, and he wielded considerable influence over Hattiesburg leaders. Fairley, a student of history, considered Burns' comparison of Hattiesburg white elites to the English Court—which became a political weapon to bolster the power of the royal Tudor and Stuart families—quite fitting.¹¹

Finally on Tuesday, the board and the superintendent agreed to a public meeting. WDAM-TV broadcast the meeting live, a move Fairley considered the white establishment's "fatal mistake" because the activists possessed the more persuasive argument, and now they had the venue to expose their struggle. On November 5, the dozen black men arrived at the public meeting with the superintendent, the school board, and the chamber of commerce well-prepared. They had chosen Fairley as their spokesman because of his skills as a sports agent, who had acquired multi-million-dollar contracts for his clients. Fairley quickly persuaded the board to concede to his first demand: the inclusion of black cheerleaders on the Hattiesburg High School squad. The white cheerleaders and their parents attended the meeting, and Fairley knew that they considered the issue important. After winning the first round, Fairley demanded more

¹¹ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2009, April 28, 2010; Bobby Chain, mayoral campaign leaflet, Bobby Chain 1997 Vertical File, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM].

substantial changes including the hiring of black teachers, the permanent reinstatement of Pickett, and the awarding of school labor contracts to black-owned companies.¹²

During the negotiations, several white men, including Bobby Chain, Mike Randolph, and Moran Pope, entered the room and lined the walls. Burns leaned over to Fairley, and whispered, “the Star Chamber.” The white men had been watching the meeting on television and decided it was time to make their presence known. When it appeared that the board might concede to each demand, Randolph shouted, “Kenneth Fairley, this is not negotiating football players. We’re talking about our children and our kid’s lives.” Fairley put his hand up in a stop signal toward Randolph. Infuriated, Randolph lunged toward Fairley and several men had to restrain him. Fairley ignored Randolph and focused on the board members and Superintendent Walker. As they continued to concede to Fairley’s demands, the Star Chamber beseeched them to “stop giving them everything.”¹³

After six hours of negotiations, the school board members and Walker conceded to most of the Operation Children First demands. They immediately reinstated Pickett and agreed that he could apply for a permanent position. They also agreed to hire more black teachers, to provide scholarship funds to African Americans for after-school programs, and to encourage greater participation of blacks in extracurricular activities and in college preparatory programs. Finally, they agreed to work with the attorney

¹² First quote, Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8, 2009 and May 12, 2009; J. Syd Conner, “Sit-in Ends; Pickett Rehired,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 1986.

¹³ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; J. Syd Conner, “Sit-in Ends; Pickett Rehired,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 1986.

general on guidelines for racial quotas in hiring black contractors on the school's building projects. To close the meeting, both groups joined hands and prayed. As of December 3, the board agreed to grant more of its contracts to black businesses, and by December 19, the school board permanently hired Pickett as assistant principal at Hattiesburg High.¹⁴

Within days of their triumph, Fairley, Burns, Woullard, Baker, and Siggers, gathered in Fairley's office and formed a liberation task force that they called the Community Improvement Association of Forrest County (CIAFC) and planned the next phase of the Second Movement in Hattiesburg. Over the next several years, the men renamed their group according to the struggle they confronted; but, for clarity purposes, the group will be referred to as CIAFC. Reverend Fairley served as the president of CIAFC because he possessed the strongest "vision" and the charismatic personality to draw the masses as well as the wealth and the contacts to force whites to negotiate. Fairley, guided by his father's conviction that blacks had "to level the field of play," argued that they needed to fundamentally transform the economic, political, and social power in Hattiesburg. He pointed out to the group that not a single black person served on the major boards in Hattiesburg—not on a bank board, hospital board, housing board, nor the chamber of commerce boards—and consequently, they lacked the power to shape their futures. They needed to demand a place "at the table," to participate in decisions, ensure the inclusion of blacks in the prosperity of the city, and protect African Americans from discrimination. Although Fairley became the president, the other four men

¹⁴ Janet Braswell, "Board Lets Public in on Meeting," *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 1986; J. Syd Conner, "Sit-in ends; Pickett Rehired," *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 1986; J. Syd Conner, "Board, Pickett Ink Long-term Contract," *Hattiesburg American*, December 19, 1986; J. Syd Conner, "Blacks Will Get More Contracts," *Hattiesburg American*, December 3, 1986.

contributed equally to the struggle with their unique talents.¹⁵

At age 50, Douglass Baker brought to the Second Movement a wealth of experience from the vastly different social worlds of his past. Raised by affluent, educated NAACP activists, he moved in circles within the black bourgeois and the founders of the Movement who exposed him to high culture, intellectual discourse, and a sophisticated view of social revolution. He became a classically trained pianist, but because his father expected him to use his gifted intellect in academia and in the civil rights struggle, he refused to allow him to attend Julliard. Instead, Baker studied history at Fisk University and Dillard University and became the first black man to graduate from the University of Mississippi's law school. In Oxford, he suffered discrimination from white supremacists, but he also cemented life long friendships with prominent white progressives. As a civil rights activist and the first black civil rights lawyer in Hattiesburg, he risked his livelihood to fight for the rights of African Americans. Behind prison walls, after his imprisonment for embezzlement, Baker became an advocate for white and black prisoners and experienced a shocking epiphany when he realized that many poor whites suffered from struggles he had never had to confront. While he had a law degree, few of them could read. His intellectual curiosity drew him to the most infamous white prisoner at Parchman—Klan bomber Thomas Tarrants. As Baker learned of Tarrants' troubled past, he began to understand how a boy raised in a culture of racism “was primed and pumped to embrace racial hatred.” Soon, the civil rights lawyer had cemented a life-long friendship with a Klansman. More than a decade later, Baker shared

¹⁵ First quote, Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009; Pastors, Mount Carmel Ministries, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, <http://www.mountcarmelministries.org/pastors.htm>.

with the CIAFC his understanding of men like Tarrants, of the white and the black dispossessed for whom he advocated, and of black and white bourgeois in his social circles. As an attorney, he developed the legal arguments for the Second Movement. As an intellectual, he raised the conversation into a complex examination of human nature. As a sensitive man with an artistic spirit, he softened the discourse.¹⁶

Fred Burns was as outspoken as Baker was quiet, and some people described him as “hot headed.” Tall, handsome, and powerfully built with dark skin, a sonorous voice, and a military background, he intimidated whites who feared black masculinity. Like Baker, Burns possessed a gifted intellect, but he used it differently. Whereas Baker, in the vein of an academic, contemplated the psychological and intellectual development of his opponents in an effort to understand them, Burns examined his opponents in the manner of a warrior. By focusing on their words, gestures, and expressions, he could determine their motives and their actions that gave him “a pulse to the direction” the group should take. Burns brought an intensity and righteousness to the Movement and a brilliant strategy to overcome the opponent. Fairley was the leader, but Burns was the general.¹⁷

Thirty-eight-year-old Reverend Siggers, also a physically imposing man with his cavernous voice, powerful stature, and intense gaze, approached the Movement like the evangelical preacher he had become at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Hattiesburg. Siggers delivered his messages with dramatic stories, though he wasted few words or gestures,

¹⁶ Quoting Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008. “Desire for Improvement,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 21, 1986; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009.

¹⁷ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Douglass T. Baker, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2009, MOHP recording; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2006 and June 10, 2009.

and he could decipher a person's character at a glance. As the middle son of a poor dry-cleaning presser and a maid, who raised him and his siblings in the Rowan community in Hattiesburg during the height of the Movement, he was intimately familiar with poverty, racism, and the freedom fight. He grew to disdain integration because it destroyed the black community and obliterated black capitalism. Siggers imagined the possibility of a separate but truly equal America, and he fought with great vigor for his community. He disdained political games and was the least approachable member of the group.¹⁸

Conversely, 32-year-old Rod Woullard, with his amicable personality, was the most approachable member. Descendant of a long established family of pastors in Forrest County, he had many contacts in Hattiesburg, and he had recently opened a roofing business. By the mid-eighties, however, he was plagued by rumors that his grandfather had spied on Vernon Dahmer and Clyde Kennard for the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. However, no one could question the grandson's devotion to the Second Movement. Rod Woullard spent long hours researching institutions, policies, and organizations that excluded and discriminated against blacks. As he possessed a sharp and expansive memory, he could produce and recall vital facts to prove any of his accusations. He attended so many civil rights meetings and protests that every time he left his house his young daughter would say, "Daddy's got to go to another meeting." All of the five men were married, except Baker who was divorced, and all of them had children. Their founding and execution of the Second Movement placed great strains on their families. Burns' involvement cost him his second marriage, and his relationship with his children grew strained. Burns understood "freedom was not free," and he

¹⁸ Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, June 10, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009.

expected all blacks in the community to sacrifice in the vein of their forebears.¹⁹

The CIAFC leaders opened an office in space donated by Fairley, and the organization solicited testimony from African Americans who suffered discriminatory treatment. In late November, five black employees from Kmart complained to CIAFC that a racist manager had fired them. They also claimed that the manager followed blacks around the store and frisked black customers and black employees before they left the premises because he considered all blacks thieves. The CIAFC leaders accepted the case. Through the media, they lambasted Kmart's firings of blacks as racist, and they accused the store of discriminating against blacks in hiring and promotions, of mistreating black customers, and of arresting more black than white shoplifters. They contacted members of the Hattiesburg Area Chamber of Commerce and warned them that if Kmart failed to resolve the situation, they would picket and boycott the store—a protest they might broaden to include all retailers and merchants across the city that discriminated against blacks. They spread the word of the movement throughout the black community. During a mass meeting hosted by Mount Carmel Church, they announced that when they initiated the “Code Red” alert, everyone should rush to picket Kmart.²⁰

The CIAFC leaders knew they were still novices in leading a protest movement,

¹⁹ Quoting Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; “Desire for Improvement,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 21, 1986; Rod Woullard, interview; R. W. Woullard, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Files, Clyde Kennard Investigation by Zack J. Van Landingham, December 17, 1958, Sovereignty Commission Record, #1-27-0-6-3-1-1, p. 27, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, [hereinafter cited as MSSC, SCR#, MDAH].

²⁰ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; M. E. Williams, “Group Protests Kmart Policy,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 1986; J. Syd Connor, “Pickets Threaten to Expand Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 30, 1986.

and they often sought the council of Rod Woullard's father, Reverend R. W. Woullard, whom they referred to as the "Godfather." Into the night, they gathered around his dining room table. In his deliberate, but soft spoken manner, he taught them how to approach the black and white public. When Reverend Woullard learned about the proposed boycott, he summoned his son and the others to his home and warned them against protesting during winter because they would fail to draw a strong crowd. He pointed out that during the Movement years, leaders held major protests in the warmer months. Furthermore, since black Hattiesburg had not led a major demonstration in over a decade the passion for mass protest had faded. If they desired to revive that enthusiasm, they must picket in decent weather. They neglected to follow his advice. When Kmart officials refused to meet with the CIAFC, Fairley issued the Code Red. At first, 75 people joined them. Soon, it grew colder and started raining. As the day progressed, the picket line thinned.²¹

The CIAFC men feared that if they terminated the picketing, they would undermine their Second Movement. So, they stayed. Finally, a black man rescued the protest when he delivered his bus to the Kmart parking lot so picketers could take breaks from the cold. Soon blacks returned, and women began bringing them meals. During the boycott, the Spirit—the secret civil rights enforcement brigade of the Movement years—reformed, and helped the CIAFC. Spirit members noted the names of African Americans shopping at Kmart in defiance of the boycott and contacted them via phone or mail to warn them to comply with the protest. They punished those still in defiance by flattening the tires on their vehicles or by shooting out the front windows of their homes. As the protest continued, Fairley estimated that the demonstrators had shut down some 95 to 98

²¹ Quoting Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009. Reverend Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

percent of the store's normal business during the Christmas shopping season. Still, Kmart officials refused to negotiate with black leaders and failed to attend a scheduled meeting. Emboldened by the massive black participation in the uprising, the CIAFC leaders announced that they planned to picket Cloverleaf mall next and then the banks.²²

Concerned about the economic impact on the city, the chamber of commerce facilitated a meeting between black leaders and Kmart officials. Kmart sent a representative from its New York office to investigate the claims of the fired employees and to meet with the CIAFC. The representative brought Fairley, Siggers, Baker, Woullard, and Burns into the office and showed them tapes of black employees stealing. They were shocked and infuriated that the employees had lied to them. Fairley admitted that those employees deserved to be terminated. Still, the CIAFC saved its protest by pointing out that the manager had harassed black customers and discriminated against blacks in promotions and hiring. Kmart agreed to review the firings of other black employees, evaluate hiring and promotion policies, investigate treatment of customers, and move the manager in question to another store. The CIAFC turned their humiliation over the thieving employees into a partial victory.²³

The white business and political leaders realized that the CIAFC was a force to be

²² Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. M. E. Williams, "Group Protests Kmart Policy," *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 1986; J. Syd Connor, "Pickets Threaten to Expand Boycott," *Hattiesburg American*, November 30, 1986; "M. E. Williams, "Protesters Say Pickett is Working," *Hattiesburg American*, December 1, 1986; M. E. Williams, "Meeting Soothes Picketers," *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1986.

²³ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Douglass T. Baker, interview; M. E. Williams, "City Forges Biracial Committee," *Hattiesburg American*, December 12, 1986, Hattiesburg History Vertical File, McCain, USM; M. E. Williams, "Meeting Soothes Picketers," *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1986.

reckoned with, particularly as Reverend Fairley held a series of mass meetings at Mount Carmel Baptist Church to announce that the Kmart protest would serve as the launching point for a series of investigations into racial discrimination. The chamber members grew increasingly worried when the CIAFC leaders began visiting stores to investigate the treatment of black employees and customers. To preempt future racial protests that could harm the economic livelihood of the city, chamber members organized the Hattiesburg Biracial Committee (HBC), which included Fairley, Baker, Siggers, Woullard, and Burns and five white businessmen Dexter Barr, V. W. Brinkerhoff, Ray Humphreys, Marvin Reuben, and Phil Mynatt.²⁴

Initially, the CIAFC leaders hoped the HBC would provide a forum for whites to acquire a greater understanding of the persistence of racial discrimination and the black struggle against covert racism. If the white members could understand the black struggle, perhaps they would work with CIAFC. With that mission in mind, Fairley arrived with a bus at one of the meetings and called on the members to take a trip with him. As he drove them through the impoverished black communities, he proclaimed, “See most of you live out West; you drive down Hardy Street to your banks and to your businesses. But you don’t come in this part.” He knew that they were afraid to come deep into the black inner

²⁴ Quoting, M. E. Williams, “Black Leaders Plan Store Visits,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 9, 1986. M. E. Williams, “City Forges Biracial Committee,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 12, 1986; M. F. Williams, “Biracial Group Sets Goals,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 17, 1986; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, June 10, 2009. Please note that the Hattiesburg Biracial Committee was simply called the biracial committee, but to distinguish it from other biracial committees that also emerged during this era, I will refer to it as the Hattiesburg Biracial Committee or the (HBC). Several black members on the HBC named a Mr. McGregor as one of the committee members rather than Phil Mynatt, but as they had trouble recalling the name and Mynatt is listed in the newspapers, it seems likely that the member was Mynatt rather than McGregor.

city. After Fairley parked the bus in the heart of a poor black neighborhood, the black men watched the whites step off the bus in their tailored suits, trying to avoid stepping into muddy potholes. Burns noticed the shocked expressions on their faces as they surveyed the dilapidated shotgun homes. The white men said they did not know that people lived in such a manner. Maybe now, Fairley and Burns hoped, they would begin to imagine life as an impoverished African American in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Maybe now they would understand.²⁵

At first, it seemed that the white HBC members would help CIAFC foster great changes for black Hattiesburg. They announced that they hoped to improve housing programs, eradicate literacy, and place more blacks on boards. The HBC also reviewed the issue of flood control in the black neighborhoods—the area in which the post civil-rights struggle had begun in the Central Piney Woods. Mayor G. D. Williamson worked with the Corps of Engineers to develop a flood prevention plan that protected most of the historically black areas in Hattiesburg. However, the CIAFC confronted greater difficulties forcing the white HBC members to take on economic discrimination and improve infrastructure in black neighborhoods. As Burns noted, the whites on the HBC seemed to empathize with the poor and working class black plight, but when Burns suggested the committee aid African American entrepreneurs, if the proposed enterprise would compete with a white business in town the white HBC members tried to sway them toward a business void in the area. Moreover, they learned that whites often

²⁵ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Fred Burns, interview, April 28, 2010. M. E. Williams, “City Forges Biracial Committee,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 12, 1986; M. E. Williams, “Biracial Members Tour Poverty-stricken Areas,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 16, 1986; Nikki Davis Maute, “Committee Focuses on Housing Needs,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 21, 1986; M. E. Williams, “Dirt Poor,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 21, 1986.

managed to find loopholes in laws to discriminate against blacks. For example, the CIAFC complained at HBC meetings that the local banks loaned federal funds under the Community Reinvestment Act to revitalize historically white areas on the west side of the track, while denying loans in devastated historically black communities on the eastside. Dexter Barr, a white banker on the committee, pointed out that federal laws permitted banks to provide loans to persons “in a deteriorating neighborhood, but not in a declining one.” Fairley realized that white financiers “redlined” most poor black neighborhoods as declining areas, but labeled white areas as “deteriorating” to ensure investment in white areas and not black neighborhoods without ever mentioning race. Whites could rebuild. Blacks could not.²⁶

According to Burns, the stated intent of the HBC was to develop a common vision, but the mission proved nearly impossible to achieve because the white and black members arrived with divergent expectations. Whites expected to broker compromises as they had previously done with the NAACP and elected black officials Eddie Holloway and Charles Lawrence. The CIAFC leaders, however, expected the full and immediate inclusion of African Americans into the city’s economic, political, and social power centers, and they refused to compromise. According to Fairley, the traditional black leadership requested rather than demanded changes, and Holloway was a true politician who would “negotiate everything out, barter and trade.” Fairley understood the political method, but he declared: “I don’t think I have to trade something for justice.” Fairley considered the aggressive method necessary because throughout the post civil-rights era,

²⁶ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; M. E. Williams, “Biracial Group Sets Goals,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 17, 1986; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Nikki Davis Maute, “Mayor’s Focus on Flooding,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 29, 1986.

whites had managed to choose which black grievances they would respond to and which ones they would ignore. The strategy allowed whites to retain control over the socioeconomic life of the city and to curb black protest.²⁷

At first, the white HBC members failed to understand that blacks were not a monolithic group with one central leadership that the masses followed. Consequently, the white members continued to respond to a CIAFC demand they disliked by saying, Holloway disagreed. The CIAFC members responded, "Holloway is not at our table." Indeed, neither Holloway nor Lawrence had joined the CIAFC in their protests. NAACP leaders Jeanette Smith and Nathan Jordan disagreed with the CIAFC tactics and distanced themselves from the group. According to Fairley, whites tried to channel power away from the CIAFC and toward the NAACP and the councilmen because with them they could negotiate. Fairley remarked, "We had to teach them that they could not choose our leadership for us." Black members of the HBC tried to enforce their will upon the white members by holding numerous mass meetings at Fairley's church. To their great joy, blacks flocked to these gatherings and enthusiastically supported the CIAFC uprising. Soon, whites learned that the black community was indeed not monolithic, but then they used that to their advantage.²⁸

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had always had its factions, but blacks long understood that as an oppressed group, they had to present a united front to their

²⁷Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009.

²⁸Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Charles Lawrence, interview; Eddie Holloway, interview. Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009, MOHP recording; Nathan Jordan, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 11, 2009, MOHP recording.

oppressors if they were to achieve their goal of liberation. Certainly, white supremacists tried to divide and conquer the Movement by turning some blacks into informants for the Sovereignty Commission, but the ability of the black community to sustain a cohesive front with common goals prevented white authorities from dividing and conquering the black struggle. In the 1980s, the white committee members were not the white supremacists of the sixties. According to Fairley and Burns, many of them had racially enlightened views, but few of them wanted to concede their power base. So they sought to divide the traditional and new black leadership by meeting with the NAACP—rather than the CIAFC—to hash out an agreement and then give the NAACP credit.²⁹

In response, CIAFC leaders tried to sustain unity in the black community while still directing the course of the Second Movement. In hopes of forcing change within the NAACP, Burns challenged incumbent president Nathan Jordan, and Baker ran for treasurer. Jordan defeated Burns 142 to 115, but Baker won the treasury post. One of CIAFC's greatest, though one of its quietest supporters, Johnny DuPree, won the position of assistant secretary. The CIAFC also refused to criticize other NAACP leaders and activists or the black councilmen publicly because they strove to create a united public front. CIAFC leaders fought the whites' divide and conquer strategy by publicly crediting the NAACP for forcing acquiescence to certain demands, but they also pledged to further such efforts by demanding more from local leaders. Within days of negotiations between the HBC whites and the NAACP, the CIAFC leaders returned to the HBC meetings with even larger lists of demands because they were not bound by the compromise made between HBC whites and the NAACP. So the CIAFC gained ground by using NAACP

²⁹ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Jeanette Smith, interview; Nathan Jordan, interview.

victories as a launching point for its more aggressive attacks.³⁰

The CIAFC's aggressive assault on discrimination encouraged media hostility. Leaders of the organization learned quickly that since whites ran and owned the media outlets in Hattiesburg, they had the power to control the public's knowledge and beliefs about the Second Movement. They needed to develop their own media forums to spread information to the people and to present their perspectives of the struggle. Burns worked with two other blacks in the community to develop a black newspaper, *The Informer*, which included articles that discussed Movement meetings and activities, explicated grievances delivered to the city and the HBC, and provided black perspectives on local, state, and world events. The CIAFC also began formulating plans to establish a radio station, but the effort ultimately failed.³¹

Still, over time, the CIAFC leaders soon had the power to force significant changes in Hattiesburg. The HBC whites worked with the city to place blacks on various bank and city boards. When the CIAFC leaders complained to Marvin Reuben that the television station he managed, WDAM-TV and radio, only had a few black employees in violation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standards that prohibited radio and television stations from discriminating, Reuben rectified the racial imbalance. He promoted an African American employee, Alvin Eaton, to a higher position in the administrative branch, hired a black sports anchor, and employed Fairley's assistant minister, Ricky Sutton, in his sales office. The CIAFC also convinced banks to hire black

³⁰ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Virginia Burkhalter, "Jordan Defeats Burns for 2nd NAACP Term," *Hattiesburg American*, December 19, 1986.

³¹ Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009 and April 28, 2010. *The Informer*, vol. 5, no. 7, July 1994, Fred Burns Collection, in author's possession.

tellers and loan officers after explaining that many blacks with wealth and excellent credit refused to conduct business with banks because they had come of age during the height of segregation and feared white bankers more than they feared black loan sharks. When the CIAFC leaders noticed that in restaurants, managers only hired blacks to work out of the public sight as janitors, dishwashers, and cooks, they persuaded many restaurant owners to hire black waiters and hosts—to bring blacks “out front.”³²

Despite these successes, CIAFC leaders confronted another major obstacle when they realized that Hattiesburg lacked African Americans with the training to assume some of the professional jobs they had fought to open to blacks. Hospital and school district administrators insisted that they hired few black doctors and teachers because they had few black applicants. After Superintendent Walker agreed to Operation Children First’s demands to set aside contracts for minority businesses and offered to grant black-owned companies the electrical, plumbing, air conditioning contracts for the Hattiesburg school district, Fairley learned that there were no black licensed contractors in the area with the ability to accept the job. Still, determined to economically “empower” the black community, the CIAFC leaders developed a twofold approach to develop a larger skilled and professional black workforce in Hattiesburg. First, they initiated a mentoring program, funded by Fairley, to train local blacks in the industrial arts. Second, they proposed that the HBC and the chamber of commerce create a task force to recruit black professionals to Hattiesburg from across the state and nation. Fairley hoped that by raising the image of African Americans from “welfare” people to professional people, the

³² Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009.

CIAFC would foster social and economic growth in the black community.³³

Some whites responded to the increasing power of the CIAFC with frustration. Many whites complained that the CIAFC fought an imagined racism to stir trouble in the black community. Jimmy Dukes considered the confrontational tactics of the CIAFC unwarranted, and he deemed the organization's complaints invalid because he believed blacks had been integrated into Hattiesburg. Dukes considered Fairley a gadfly; "I have always felt that Mr. Fairley, whenever he could, enjoyed stirring racial unrest when it was totally unnecessary." Some whites denounced Fairley as a "racist." Fairley responded to his critics by declaring that "we're dealing with 200 years of bondage and slavery and being deliberately left behind. It's a catch up. . . . We don't want welfare, but a fair share." Fairley and his CIAFC colleagues wanted a Hattiesburg that reflected the racial composition of the city in which blacks were as visible as whites in the higher echelons of the economic, political, judicial, and social positions, and they were willing to use aggressive tactics to achieve their goals.³⁴

Throughout most of the post civil-rights era, black activists had used the courts and the political halls to achieve black rights and to lobby for black interests. The return to direct-action tactics divided the black leadership as most NAACP members along with Councilmen Holloway and Lawrence preferred boardroom diplomacy to street protest. Holloway considered the Kmart demonstration a disaster because most of the complaining employees deserved their firings. Although Baker conceded that sometimes

³³ First quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; second quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Arthur Siggers, interview.

³⁴ First quote, James K. Dukes, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009.

blacks, like those Kmart employees, took advantage of the race card for personal gain, he emphasized that because blacks “have lived in a society in which they have been discriminated upon so much that [some of them] are not able to distinguish between [their] bad behavior and discrimination.” Despite the problems with the Kmart case, Holloway and Lawrence agreed with the leaders of CIAFC that racial discrimination remained problematic in Hattiesburg. They disagreed, however, on the methods to confront it. They particularly clashed over CIAFC’s response to racial controversies in the schools from its Operation Children First sleep-in protest to its support of the appeal in the *Pittman* school desegregation case.³⁵

The *Pittman* case caused renewed controversy within the black community and between the white and black communities in January 1987 when the U. S. Court of Appeals reversed the district court’s ruling in the case. The justices unanimously found that the magnet plan agreed upon by the traditional black leadership and the white community failed to sufficiently desegregate Hattiesburg’s elementary schools. The justices understood the district court’s concern with white flight; however, they ruled that as the distance to integrated schools proved quite short, “the plea for neighborhood schools rings hollow.” Moreover, the district court plan failed to integrate two predominantly black schools. They concluded that “the [magnet] plan is like a voice from the past crying for ‘gradualism.’ Constitutionally, its desegregative effect is too little and too late.” The justices ordered the district court to develop an immediate pairing plan. Many white residents lambasted the ruling and complained about having to bus their

³⁵ Quoting Douglass T. Baker, interview; Eddie Holloway interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; and Nikki Davis Maute, “Black Leadership United,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 28, 1986.

children across town. The white president of the school board, Charles Phillips, however, insinuated that racism lay at the root of white opposition when he noted that both the magnet and pairing plan required bussing.³⁶

The controversy over *Pittman* continued when the school board and the city council approved a pairing plan in late February that closed several historically black schools including Grace Love and Eureka and which forced more black students than white students to take busses to integrate the schools. When several blacks responded in outrage, Superintendent Walker formed a biracial committee to investigate the proposal. During the investigation, Fairley and Holloway engaged in several heated arguments over the case. Holloway rebuked the efforts of Operation Children First and CIAFC, and he warned Fairley that whites would flee. Fairley responded, “Well Eddie, if they want to run, then let them run. And when they leave here, we’ll take over. . . . If they don’t want to be with us, then let them go.” Lawrence and Holloway understood that the schools were unlawfully segregated, but they knew too that when the white middle and upper class fled, the tax base, financial donations to the schools, and fundraising efforts would diminish. Councilman Lawrence, who served on the superintendent’s committee, stressed publicly that the loss of students, regardless of their race, would diminish the district’s revenue, which meant that the black children left behind, including his son, would suffer. Undaunted by the rebukes or by the councilmen, the CIAFC held mass meetings in early March to protest the board’s proposal and threatened to launch lawsuits to prevent its

³⁶ Quoting *United States of America and Zandra Pitman et al. v. The State of Mississippi et al. and Hattiesburg Municipal Separate School District*, Case No. 85-4804, United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 808 F. 2d 385; 1987 U. S. App. LEXIS 1364. J. Syd Connor, “Integration Speed-up Ordered,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 1987; Syd Connor, “Blacks, Whites Split on Integration Ruling,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 18, 1987.

implementation.³⁷

Throughout these intraracial and interracial battles, Fairley struggled to ensure that the final implementation of *Pittman* would occur in an equitable manner unlike the inequitable school integration of the 1970s. To achieve that goal, he demanded that blacks have an equal, if not controlling, hand in the administration of the schools, beginning with the Hattiesburg school board. Every year, Fairley visited the mayor to demand that he appoint more blacks to the board. Just weeks after the *Pittman* ruling, a position on the board opened. It was actually Holloway who convinced Mayor Williamson to appoint Johnny DuPree to the position. Still, the appointment pleased all the major black players in Hattiesburg. DuPree served as assistant secretary of the NAACP, and though DuPree and Fairley were childhood friends and DuPree supported the goals of the CIAFC, he often disagreed with its methods, which made him agreeable to the traditional black leadership.³⁸

The nomination honored DuPree as he held education in high regard. He had earned a reputation in high school among blacks and whites as a diligent student with a brilliant mind, but he became a father right out of high school and had to defer his college education. By 1987 he was the store manager at Sears and the father of three daughters.

³⁷ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. J. Syd Conner, "Lawrence: Sound Plan Takes Time," *Hattiesburg American*, January 23, 1987; Syd Connor, "Blacks, Whites Split on Integration Ruling," *Hattiesburg American*, January 18, 1987; J. Syd Conner, "Fairley Praises Court Ruling," *Hattiesburg American*, January 17, 1987; J. Syd Conner, "New Plan Closes Four Schools," *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 1987; J. Syd Conner, "Proposal Ignites Burns," *Hattiesburg American*, February 27, 1987; J. Syd Conner, "Blacks Protest," *Hattiesburg American*, March 4, 1987; Eddie Holloway, interview; Charles Lawrence, interview.

³⁸ Johnny DuPree, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recording; Virginia Burkhalter, "Jordan Defeats Burns for 2nd NAACP Term," *Hattiesburg American*, December 19, 1986; Eddie Holloway, interview.

Although he worked 70 hours a week, he took courses at USM, and he participated in those Movement activities that he considered worthwhile. Well-liked by whites and blacks alike, few residents considered DuPree a radical. Nevertheless, white council members Kathryn Cummings and John Buckley considered voting against DuPree's appointment because they worried about DuPree's close relationship with Reverend Fairley. During the ratification meeting, Lawrence insisted that the council allow the interview to proceed, and Holloway prevented efforts by Cummings and Buckley to table the nomination when he insisted on a vote. In the interview, Dupree presented himself as a moderate in racial affairs. He noted that he supported some of Operation Children First's demands, including the hiring of more black teachers, since the student body was predominantly black. In terms of his relationship with Fairley, he candidly declared that he and Fairley grew up together and remained close friends. But, he added, "I am my own person and I make my own decisions. I support certain things of that activism movement and in my view they are valid. But I am not controlled by anyone. I am not ashamed to say that someone is my friend, and I am not ashamed to say when I disagree with them." The council unanimously confirmed DuPree's appointment.³⁹

While DuPree joined the school board in March, the Department of Justice and black parents involved in the *Pittman* suit modified the school board plan to even the burden of bussing on black and white children. In July, each of the parties in the *Pittman* case—the school board, the Department of Justice, and the plaintiffs—chose four

³⁹ J. Syd Conner, "Mayor Promises Black School Board Member," *Hattiesburg American*, January 31, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, "City Council Takes Dupree Vote," *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dupree Says Right Things," *Hattiesburg American*, February 4, 1987; Eddie Holloway, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Johnny DuPree, interview; Billy McGee, interview May 7, 2009, by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recording

members to serve on a temporary biracial school board to oversee the execution of the new desegregation orders. Despite these momentous efforts, as Holloway had predicted, the implementation of *Pittman* on the heels of Operation Children First precipitated white flight. Over 10 percent of whites fled the Hattiesburg district by December. A year after the ruling, the percentage of white students attending public schools fell from 43 to 28 percent and by 1995, the percentage had dropped to 22 percent. Some whites sent their children to private academies. Others violated district lines and sent their children to schools in whiter districts in adjacent Lamar County. Some moved to Lamar County or to the predominantly white Petal district. Realtors persuaded whites who were new in the area to buy houses in Lamar County by pointing out that blacks dominated the student body in Hattiesburg schools.⁴⁰

During the CIAFC battles over the Hattiesburg schools, the CIAFC had begun chartering community improvement associations in several adjacent counties as they tried to spread the Second Movement across South Mississippi. Similar to the CORE Freedom Task Force of the 1960s, when the CIAFC leaders moved into a county, they organized local leadership and mobilized the indigenous citizens into Movement activists. In Jeff Davis County, the CIAFC organized boycotts of white businesses in hopes that business owners would force a supervisor to pave roads in the black community. Although

⁴⁰ Johnny DuPree, interview; J. Syd Conner, "Judge Approves School Plan," *Hattiesburg American*, April 29, 1987; Tim Doherty, "Schools,' 'White Flight' More Than Forecast," *Hattiesburg American*, December 15, 1987; Kenneth Fairley, interviews May 8 and 13, 2009; Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration In Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 190.

enraged gun-toting whites tried to disrupt their meetings and threatened to harm them, the CIAFC leaders persisted, and the boycott was successful.⁴¹

In late November, CIAFC answered a call for help from Manuel Jones, president of the Laurel-Jones County NAACP. Jones and many blacks in Laurel had grown frustrated over the years that although blacks dominated the student body in the Laurel district, whites dominated the administrative bodies, and white students won most of the academic awards and dominated some of the extracurricular activities. Since the early 1980s, whites had fled Laurel and its integrated schools. During the 1981/1982 school year, blacks comprised 62 percent of the student population. By 1989, blacks comprised 75 percent. Whites had always dominated the county schools. During the 1978/1979 school year, whites comprised 82 percent of the Jones County school population and blacks 18 percent. The racial composition barely fluctuated over the decade.⁴²

In the vein of Operation Children First's tactics, on October 28, 1987, Jones and the Laurel NAACP sent a list of 31 demands to the Laurel school board and threatened to demonstrate unless the board met each stipulation. On the administrative and faculty level, the NAACP leaders demanded that the board tip the racial balance from whites to blacks by replacing the white superintendent, David Sheppard, with an African-

⁴¹ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Nikki Davis Maute, "Sheriff Halts Jeff Davis Sit-in," *Hattiesburg American*, March 17, 1987; J. Syd Conner, "Jeff Davis Supervisor Agrees to Meet Blacks," *Hattiesburg American*, April 2, 1987.

⁴² Memorandum Opinion and Order, July 27, 1989, 5-6, *City of Laurel Board v. Jones County School Board* (1989), case no. 87-245, Transfer No. 021920367, Box No. 28, Location No. 10071973, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, Georgia, [hereinafter cited as NARA].

American, shift the racial ratio of the school principals from seven whites and three blacks to five and five, hire a black guidance counselor, hire more black coaches, and freeze hiring of white teachers until the school hired 51 new black teachers. In the interest of providing more opportunities for black businesses, the NAACP insisted that the Laurel district sign contracts with black companies for 50 percent of the school's material needs, including vending machines, equipment, maintenance, and construction. To ensure the continuation of such policies, the NAACP leaders demanded the development of a bi-racial committee and a full-time black director of affirmative action to oversee the policy changes.⁴³

The NAACP also accused the high school, which by the 1980s was renamed Laurel High School, of discriminating against black students, and they demanded that the board institute racial quotas in academic and extracurricular activities. Since blacks comprised 70 percent of the school population, administrators should ensure that African Americans obtain 70 percent of the spots on the football cheerleading squad, receive 70 percent of academic awards, and comprise 70 percent of the gifted track classes. The demands confounded some Laurel whites who pointed out that African Americans held all the offices on the student council, all the positions on the basketball cheerleading squad, and dominated all the sports teams. Furthermore, 12 of the last 14 homecoming sweethearts were black, and a black person served as the band major. State NAACP chairman Morris Kinsey ignored these statistics and wildly compared Laurel High school policies to South Africa, declaring, "We have apartheid here in Laurel." Moreover, the NAACP leaders insisted that teachers cease failing black students and terminate the

⁴³ Melinda Gholson, "Laurel Blacks Pickett," *Hattiesburg American*, October 28, 1987, Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM.

policy of “tracking” blacks into the remedial courses in disproportionate numbers to their white counterparts. Finally, they expected the administration to develop an in-school suspension policy and terminate the practice of using students to participate in fund-raising activities and holding them responsible if the profits disappeared. After the NAACP leaders delivered their grievance list to the board, four NAACP members marched in front of the school board offices, and they warned officials that if they failed to comply with their demands, the NAACP would launch an economic boycott of Laurel.⁴⁴

The NAACP had some legitimate complaints regarding racial imbalances on the board, administration, faculty, and staff, and if teachers discriminated against black students in grading, then the district should have taken action to ensure fair grading procedures. However, to simply insist teachers pass students because of their race and ignore violations of rules sent a false message that African Americans lacked the ability to achieve academically and to act responsibly. Certainly, the NAACP’s demands needed revision, but white authorities failed to respond to a single complaint and ignored the protest. Frustrated, Jones contacted Reverend Fairley in Hattiesburg and requested the aid of the CIAFC.⁴⁵

The CIAFC and the Laurel-Jones NAACP considered developing a joint black protest of Laurel and Hattiesburg. By the fall of 1987 CIAFC leaders had grown frustrated with the failure of the Hattiesburg school district to hire black administrators

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Melinda Gholson, “School Board Eyes NAACP Demands,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 25, 1987; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009.

and teachers. Burns accused the white community of focusing more on strategies to stem the tide of white flight from the schools than on the students who remained in the district. CIAFC also claimed that white merchants who hired blacks in the wake of the Kmart protest in late 1986 had fired them. During a mass meeting at Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Burns announced that blacks may need to “find somewhere else to shop this Christmas until we get our house in order. That would teach the white folks a lesson.” Twelve members of the Laurel-Jones branch of the NAACP attended the meeting.⁴⁶

Burns’ announcement launched a firestorm of arguments between the races in Hattiesburg, which reflected their vastly divergent perspectives on racial progress. The editors of the *Hattiesburg American* proclaimed that Hattiesburg had achieved great advances in racial relations and cited the election of two black city councilmen and a black legislator as well as the appointment of black board members as proof of racial progress. The Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce also stressed that many merchants had hired blacks. Burns responded that the two black council members and the black legislator had achieved their posts only after blacks launched lawsuits to force the city and the state to create majority black districts, and Hattiesburg had only made strides in employment opportunities because blacks had organized protests to terminate discrimination. Burns also noted that whites never shopped at black businesses, but no city uproar exploded over their permanent boycott. A black resident, Joyce Jones, supported Burns in a letter to the editor that reflected black despair. White flight, she noted sent the message that “we, as a race, don’t have anything of value to offer that

⁴⁶ Quoting Lisa Easterling, “Hattiesburg Area Residents May Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 24, 1987; Melinda Gholson, “Laurel Blacks Pickett,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 28, 1987, Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM.

young whites might need to absorb and observe to be fitted for the adult world.” She emphasized that whites were taught to fear “inhuman blacks: the filth of God’s earth. His black mistake . . . never to be viewed as vulnerable humans, downtrodden and hurt with their own cultural gift that the world-at-large should learn from and absorb. . . We, too, see what Burns sees, but we are too weary to fight.”⁴⁷

The CIAFC leaders were not too weary to fight, and they moved into Jones County in late November to develop a joint black community protest of Laurel and Hattiesburg. During a mass meeting at St. Paul Methodist Church in Laurel, state NAACP chairman Morris Kinsey informed the 100 blacks in attendance that if the Laurel School Board failed to meet the demands by December 5, the NAACP would launch “an all-out war down here,” in the form of mass boycotts and major protests. Reverend Fairley called on Laurel blacks to refrain from shopping in Hattiesburg because blacks planned to launch a boycott in the Hub City too. He reminded them that small numbers of people could effect change; after all, “Jesus took just a few and He changed the world.” The following day, the Laurel school board sent a letter to the Jones County NAACP in which it denied discriminating against African American administrators, faculty, and students in the Laurel schools and refused requests for a meeting.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Quoting Joyce Jones, “Too Weary to Fight,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 10, 1987. Fred Burns, “American Sees City Incorrectly,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 6, 1987; M. E. Williams and Kelly Carson, “Business Defend Treatment of Blacks,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 25, 1987; “Burns View of Hattiesburg is Distorted,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 29, 1987.

⁴⁸ First quote, Melinda Gholson, “Boycott Backers Gather in Laurel,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 26, 1987; second quote, Lisa Easterling, “Hattiesburg Area Residents May Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 24, 1987. “Laurel Denies Discrimination,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 27, 1987; Melinda Gholson, “Atlanta Chief: I’ll Announce Laurel Boycott Date,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 1987;

CIAFC leaders were not entirely shocked by the response of Laurel whites. According to Burns, the “Klan mentality” still thrived in Jones County, and unlike in Hattiesburg, many Laurel whites still so disdained blacks that they would not even concede to a civilized meeting. Rather, they would make the decisions and ignore the black protest. Fairley considered Jones a “great warrior,” but he also understood that Jones confronted more intransigent opponents. The Mississippi NAACP had a similar perspective on Laurel. During one NAACP meeting, Mississippi NAACP President Aaron Henry castigated the Laurel government, the school board, and the business owners as racists and declared that school integration had failed because the state government and local boards—“the people who fought hardest to prevent integration from becoming a reality are now the people in charge of making it work.” To worsen matters, the black community experienced even greater divisions than Hattiesburg over protest tactics. The Laurel battle quickly fractured, as several different groups struggled to control the proposed boycott. The NAACP’s southern regional director in Atlanta announced that the Laurel-Jones County branch would only boycott when he issued such orders. Until that time, the NAACP would pursue meetings with the school board and the Jones County Economic Development authority, and the local NAACP would picket and host mass meetings.⁴⁹

Melinda Gholson, “Blacks Begin Boycott of Laurel Business,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1987.

⁴⁹ First quote, Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009; second quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009; third quote, Melinda Gholson, “Atlanta Chief: I’ll Announce Laurel Boycott Date,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 1987. Melinda Gholson, “NAACP’s Henry Says Boycott May Be Coming,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 29, 1987; Melinda Gholson, “Boycott Backers Gather in Laurel,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 26, 1987; “Laurel Denies

The Black Concerned Citizens led by D. R. Henry defied the NAACP orders and launched its own boycott of all Laurel stores, except the A & P because the owner had hired a black manager. Susie Ruffin, a civil rights icon in Laurel, began picketing the Jitney Jungle on her own. Few blacks participated, and the boycott foundered. Moreover, unbeknownst to the Concerned Citizens and the NAACP, the white establishment secretly planned to dissolve the Laurel school district. During the fall, Mayor Sam Lindsey and white elites met secretly as they launched a plan to annex portions of Jones County and consolidate the Laurel and Jones County school districts. On November 3, Mayor Lindsey and five of the seven Laurel council members passed an annexation ordinance. Although the city leaders tried to justify consolidation by claiming they wanted to reintegrate the schools, economics rather than racial concerns fueled the consolidation campaign. The small population of the entire county failed to warrant a city and a county district, and since 1970, white flight had led to a decreasing tax base in the city. Business leaders supported consolidation because it would save nearly a million dollars in costs. Once word of the consolidation plans leaked out, the planned bi-county boycott of Hattiesburg and Laurel faded. Laurel activists focused their efforts on fighting consolidation efforts, and the CIAFC confronted a series of its own setbacks.⁵⁰

Discrimination,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 27, 1987; Melinda Gholson, “Blacks Begin Boycott of Laurel Business,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1987.

⁵⁰ Melinda Gholson, “Atlanta Chief: I’ll Announce Laurel Boycott Date,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 1987; Melinda Gholson, “Blacks Begin Boycott of Laurel Business,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 4, 1987. Melinda Gholson, “Laurel Blacks End Boycott,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 10, 1988; Enlargement of Corporate Boundaries of the City of Laurel, Second District, Jones County, Mississippi, petition, case no. 39,287, November 3, 1987, attached to case file, *City of Laurel Board v. Jones County School Board*, case no. 87-245, Transfer No. 021920367, Box No. 28, Location No. 10071973, NARA. Susan Vincent, interview, June 12, 2009; Joe Norman,

In Hattiesburg, over the course of the Second Movement, many whites had grown frustrated with the CIAFC, and according to several CIAFC leaders, the white establishment tried to destroy them. They tried to ruin Baker's reputation by reintroducing stories in the media of his imprisonment in the 1970s for fraud. Ashamed, Baker retreated from the struggle temporarily. Burns alleged that powerful whites tried to control him by ensuring that he had trouble sustaining employment in white-owned businesses. In response, Fairley hired Burns to work in his insurance business until Burns acquired a civil service job as a postal worker. Reverend Fairley's wealth and his popularity among the black masses insulated him from economic attacks. But, soon, Fairley and Burns received threats to their lives. A black person brought the CIAFC a flyer he had found whites distributing that contained a map of Hattiesburg with an X marked over the homes of Burns and Fairley. Burns refused to be afraid, but Fairley was worried. Fairley lived in an upscale white neighborhood, and he was unsure of his enemies. Burns ribbed Fairley that Fairley should come stay with him in the "hood [because] they got to come through the brothers to get to me." Fairley grew even more concerned when a black man, who moved in circles with the white elites, warned Fairley that he had become a target of powerful whites, and his informer worried they might kill him. Fairley called on the "brotherhood of the spirits" and they guarded his home. According to Fairley, because whites realized that they could "not physically lynch me" with impunity, they planned to "politically lynch me."⁵¹

interview, May 6, 2010; Dennis Kevyrn, interview, May 7, 2010, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

⁵¹ First quote, Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009.

In December 1987, one of Fairley's former clients, professional football player Marcus Dupree, initiated several lawsuits against him. Dupree had recently received a \$4.54 million dollar insurance policy settlement after a knee injury ended his career with the New Orleans Breakers of the United States Football League. DuPree's lawyers accused Fairley of defrauding Dupree of \$1.51 million dollars from the policy by persuading Dupree to sign a contract that entitled Fairley to one-third of the settlement. In another lawsuit, Dupree accused Fairley of illegally accepting a real estate commission from him in a business deal involving the sale of land owned by Dupree, Fairley, and their third business partner, professional football player Louis Lipps, who was also Fairley's client. According to Fairley and several members of CIAFC, powerful whites convinced DuPree to launch the fraudulent lawsuits to drive Fairley from the Second Movement and from Hattiesburg. Instead, Fairley filed a \$4 million counter lawsuit in which he accused DuPree of spreading lies about his business dealings to his other clients and business associates and discouraging them from conducting business with him. Fairley spent most of his savings in legal fees, and the mass publicity of his case damaged his business ventures. According to Fairley, when it appeared he might win the civil suit, whites decided to threaten him, and they sent a friend to warn him that if he did not leave town, they would file criminal charges against him. Soon afterward, a white lawyer, John Allen Morris, approached Fairley and took his case for free as he considered the lawsuits a "modern-day lynching." Morris brought in DeWitt Sullivan, a well-known accountant, who helped him prove that DuPree never acted unlawfully and that a basic

accounting error resulted in Fairley owing Dupree \$247.00. Fairley and Dupree settled the matter out of court. In January 1989, Judge Henry T. Wingate dismissed the case.⁵²

Still, many whites argued that Fairley used the race card and the Second Movement to cover his fraudulent business dealings, and they claimed that he continued in such a vein as he rebuilt his empire. Fairley lambasted all such accusations as vicious rumors designed to destroy him. He insisted that he and the CIAFC had initiated the Second Movement with altruistic goals to uplift the black community and that in all of their dealings “our intent and the intent of our hearts were pure. We sought no self glory, no self recognition.” The DuPree affair had harmed Fairley. Although he won the lawsuit, he lost his public integrity, his business profits greatly decreased, and his church suffered. By the late 1980s, Mount Carmel had been holding three packed church services. After the DuPree case, the black bourgeois began an exodus from his church. Fairley prayed for help as he believed God had inspired the CIAFC to launch the Second Movement, and he fought back.⁵³

Fairley had long before decided that blacks could never defeat the racism of the

⁵² Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; *Marcus L. DuPree v. Kenneth E. Fairley* (1987), case no. 47841, *Forrest County Chancery General Docket*, vol. 45, 120, and *Marcus L. DuPree v. D L & F Investments Ltd. et al.* (1988), case no. 48360, *Forrest County Chancery General Docket*, vol. 45, 380, *DuPree v. Fairley* (1987), *Forrest County Chancery Minute Book*, vol. 489, 477A-477D, all in Chancery Clerk’s Office, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Janet Braswell, “Settlement Reached in Dupree Suit,” *Hattiesburg American*, n. d., Marcus DuPree Vertical File, McCain, USM; Janet Braswell, “DuPree Sues Fairley,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 2, 1987; Janet Braswell, “DuPree Claims Fairley Cheated Him,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 3, 1987. Tim Doherty, “Fairley: Dupree Lawsuit False,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 19, 1988; Janet Braswell, “Fairley Sues Dupree,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 21, 1988, both in Ken Fairley Vertical File, McCain, USM.

⁵³ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Kim Bradley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 4, 2010, MOHP recording.

white power structure unless they acquired an equal place in the economic and political life of Hattiesburg. Fairley recognized that to achieve such goals, blacks must unite, mobilize, and uplift the black community. In late 1988, he ran for the presidency of the Forrest County branch of the NAACP against incumbent Nathan Jordan. During the campaign, Fairley portrayed the NAACP as part of the traditional black leadership that had moved too slowly and had failed to aggressively confront racism. The election turned into a major campaign covered extensively by the local media. Fairley received mass support from the poor, but criticism from the bourgeois. Determined to win, Fairley brought people to the polls in busses. He won by 40 votes. Members also elected Rod Woullard as assistant secretary and Douglass Baker to serve on the Executive Committee. The CIAFC leaders had regained their strength, and they hoped to use the NAACP as a vehicle to unite the black grassroots and the bourgeois for the common cause of black uplift.⁵⁴

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, to revolutionize the Forrest County branch of the NAACP, Reverend Fairley and the CIAFC nucleus concentrated on four areas: black economic, educational, political, and social growth. To achieve economic parity with whites, they participated in meetings with the chamber of commerce to recruit industries to Hattiesburg that would hire blacks, and they reactivated the Forrest County NAACP branch's labor and industry boards to monitor business practices. They also intensified their efforts to improve the formal and industrial education of black students with mentoring programs. In terms of social and educational growth, Fairley planned to

⁵⁴ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Shirley Scholfeild, "New NAACP Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, December 30, 1988; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

stem the rising problems in the black community with drugs and crime by creating preemptive programs that guided the youth toward productive activities. He reasoned that if all African Americans could achieve an education and learn to perceive themselves as having potential and talent, and if they could take advantage of opportunities for success, then they could become productive members of society that contributed to the community rather than drained its resources. Reverend Siggers, however, noted that he and the other CIAFC leaders, failed to infuse the mentoring and education programs with the same enthusiasm that they brought to the protests and eventually many such efforts faded into oblivion. At that point, Siggers began to move away from the CIAFC and work within his church to mentor the black youth from the inner cities.⁵⁵

The NAACP was more successful in achieving its fourth goal—the acquisition of political power—by developing a voter registration program, Registration, Education, Participation (REP). NAACP leaders hosted civic classes to educate and politicize blacks; they held voter registration drives to strengthen the black voting bloc; and they mobilized voters during elections to elect black candidates sensitive to black interests. Through the NAACP, the CIAFC nucleus shifted from the boycott to the ballot to force change. As Fairley phrased it, they were “hiring and firing at the polls.” In 1989, to raise money to fund the NAACP’s programs, Fairley invited Jesse Jackson, a veteran civil rights activist who had just run for president, to speak at the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet in Hattiesburg. Although Jackson’s fee was high, Fairley rented out the USM Coliseum and sold expensive tickets for the tables on the floor and numerous cheaper tickets for the

⁵⁵ Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and May 13, 2009. Shirley Scholfeild, “New NAACP Chief,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 30, 1988; Arthur Siggers, interview.

masses. Prominent whites, including Dexter Barr from the HBC, bought a table for his bank executives. The event and other fundraising efforts allowed Fairley to open an NAACP health clinic and to acquire office space for the NAACP headquarters. Fairley's renewed popularity helped him rebuild his empire. Through his church, Fairley developed a private school, Alpha Christian, and he founded various ministries that reached out to the community. Despite these successes, the final battles over the continued failures of school integration stemmed racial progress and stifled racial reconciliation, particularly as some whites accused blacks of reverse racism.⁵⁶

As of 1990, Hattiesburg High School was one of the few schools left in the Hattiesburg Municipal School District that was ideally integrated, at least numerically, with nearly a fifty/fifty ratio of black and white pupils. The students, however, had not assimilated with each other, and the campus suffered many racial conflicts. White students often complained to the administration that whites were not always the villains in the racial conflicts that arose, but the administrators ignored them. As one white student, Bob West, contended, "If black students raised Cain, it's OK. If the white students raise Cain, they're called racists." In 1990 when many black students started wearing T-Shirts with "Africa" printed on the front and "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand" on the back, some whites wondered why the administration tolerated these racially exclusive sentiments. And would they tolerate it from whites? West and his brother, Lee, decided to test their administration. They printed a T-Shirt with the words "Great Britain" printed on the front and "It's a white thing, you wouldn't understand" on

⁵⁶ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13; Shirley Scholfeild, "New NAACP Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, December 30, 1988. Mount Carmel Baptist Church Pastors, <http://www.mountcarmelministries.org/pastors.htm>.

the back, and they sold them to 40 students who wore them to school. As the white students expected, their shirts received the attention of everyone, even newspapers, which began printing stories about the racial divide in the school. The incident revealed a growing frustration among a young generation of whites who considered themselves victims of reverse racism, and it revealed that some whites fled city schools because they determined they would be more welcome in predominantly white schools. Integration was failing.⁵⁷

Still, in some final efforts to preserve school integration, Councilman Holloway and several white leaders, including a white school board member, Joe Paul, proposed to build a new high school near Highway 49 that had become the new border between black and white communities. Paul, a racial progressive, approached Fairley and asked for his support in hopes that it would “kill white flight.” Fairley agreed to the proposal on the conditions that the district build the school on the black side of Highway 49 and that the mayor appoint another black school board member and a black superintendent. According to Fairley, Paul persuaded the new mayor, Ed Morgan, to agree to the conditions, but the plan soon collapsed. Although the board and Mayor Morgan hired an African American superintendent, they neglected to place another black person on the school board. Moreover, many whites opposed the site for the school as they wanted it built on the white side of Highway 49. Whites continued to flee the Hattiesburg district.⁵⁸

The steady depopulation of the city caused by white flight spurred Hattiesburg

⁵⁷ Chantel Foretrich, “Area Incidents Viewed Differently,” *Hattiesburg American*, [?], 1990, Race Relations Vertical File, McCain, USM.

⁵⁸ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Eddie Holloway, interview; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009; Nikki Davis Maute, “New School Sites Discussed,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 12, 1987.

officials to grow the city through annexation, but they confronted a myriad of racial divides over the impact of annexation on the racial composition of the schools. In 1987 the city leaders filed a petition in chancery court to annex portions of Forrest and Lamar counties. Many whites, who had moved to the Oak Grove community of Lamar County and sent their children to the schools in Oak Grove, feared that annexation would force their children back into the predominantly black city school district. City leaders pledged that although the annexation would expand the city's industrial and commercial base, a Mississippi state law implemented a year earlier prohibited the city from incorporating the schools from Lamar County into the Hattiesburg district. Indeed in 1986, Representative Stone Barefield, a white Forrest County resident, had convinced the Mississippi legislature to pass bills that ensured that students in annexed territories within the county or in adjacent counties would remain in their original school district. All the promises by politicians failed to console white parents in Lamar County, particularly when black leaders in Hattiesburg, including new school board member Johnny DuPree, began insisting that Barefield's bills violated the federal desegregation orders stemming from the 1954 *Brown* decision and other U. S. Supreme Court rulings.⁵⁹

From the onset, the opposition to annexation in Oak Grove had racial overtones. Only 5 percent of the children in Oak Grove schools were black compared to over 60 percent in Hattiesburg schools. Several white residents informed reporters that they preferred the racial composition of their schools and one pastor, Reverend Roy Grace,

⁵⁹ *Johnny DuPree et al. v. Mike Moore* No. 96 U.S. 669 (1996), U.S. LEXIS 1284, Supreme Court of the United States, 1996 U.S. Briefs 669; 1996 U.S. S. Ct. Briefs LEXIS 1284. Nikki Davis Maute, "Hands Off: City Will Not Annex Oak Grove Schools," *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 1987; "Timeline Traces Battle of Growth Since 1988," *Hattiesburg American*, May 30, 1991, both in Hattiesburg Annexation (1987) Vertical File, McCain, USM. Johnny DuPree, interview.

blatantly told reporters that “we don’t want our son to go to school with niggers.” The racial slur generated controversy. Many white residents lambasted the newspaper for printing it because it portrayed all of them as racists; and others accused the newspaper of instigating racial strife. Reverend Grace sought to retract his statement by claiming he had “worshipped with black people” and considered them his Christian brothers and sisters, but that he simply forgot to use the term “black” rather than the slur he grew up using. Many black residents considered his second statement insincere and viewed the slur as reflective of the persistence of racist sentiment in the Central Piney Woods. Representative Percy Watson declared that although the white and black communities had made great strides in racial relations, “the statement destroyed some of our hopes and beliefs and served as a bitter and painful reminder that racism is alive and well in this community.”⁶⁰

Racial tensions intensified when the Hattiesburg School District board members, led by their new president, Johnny DuPree, contested Barefield’s bills in court. During the 1991 trial, DuPree and the board argued that if the city annexed portions of Lamar and Forrest counties, the children in those annexed parcels must attend city schools. They pointed out that the residents in the annexed territory would be considered citizens of Hattiesburg with the right to vote for the mayor and city council, who in turn, selected the

⁶⁰ First quote, J. Syd Conner, “Oak Grove Schools Don’t Need Black Kids,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 17, 1987; second quote, Roy Grace, “Minister Explains Oak Grove Stand,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 19, 1987; third quote, Nikki Davis Maute, “Watson: Racism is Alive,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 20, 1987. “Judgment at Issue in Our Coverage,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 19, 1987; Joe E. Garvin, “Says Article was Irresponsible,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 20, 1987; Bobby Banks, “Stop Stirring Strife and Discord,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 20, 1987. Dennis Onderjeak, “A Shade of Yellow,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 26, 1987; Rev. Woodrow Armstrong, “Poor Choice of Words,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 26, 1987.

members of the Hattiesburg school board, and yet, these citizens would not send their children to the schools that the board members represented. Most of these annexed residents, particularly in Lamar County, were white, and accordingly their vote would dilute the black voice in politics. DuPree accused the Forrest County School Board, the Lamar County School Board, and the State of Mississippi of violating the Voting Rights Act of 1965 because they failed to acquire preclearance from the Department of Justice for an act that would result in changes in the voting population and shifts in precinct boundaries. The court found in favor of the defendants.⁶¹

DuPree appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court. After hearing a similar case, *Clark v. Roemer*, which argued that the state must “unambiguously” submit to the U.S. Attorney General any changes that involved voting, the justices remanded the DuPree case to the U. S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi to decide if the state had submitted such changes with sufficient clarity. Under the new precedent of *Clark v. Roemer*, the court found that Mississippi had not achieved proper clearance and found in favor of DuPree. The state of Mississippi and the Forrest and Lamar County school boards appealed, but lost in 1994 and again in 1995. The defendants appealed again. On June 10, 1996, the U. S. Supreme Court found in favor of DuPree, but the defendants received a stay of the order while the state filed for judicial preclearance. After the Department of Justice cleared the defendant’s plan, they

⁶¹ *Johnny Dupree, et al. v. Ray Mabus, et al. The Lamar County Board of Education and Trustees and the Forrest County School District and Trustees* (1991), case no. H90-0043(W), United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, Hattiesburg Division, 776 F. Supp. 290; 1991 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 15974.

appealed and won the case. The annexation proceeded, but the districts remained separate.⁶²

Despite all the conflicts and trials over segregation, re-segregation was safely ensconced in 1998 when the federal court determined that Hattiesburg no longer suffered from racial desegregation in its schools, and the judge terminated the court's control over the Hattiesburg district. When the district leaders acquired power over their schools again, they returned to the neighborhood district plan. Some 800 children would no longer ride busses to schools. Most whites supported the plan while blacks were divided over the ruling. Some blacks feared that the few remaining predominantly white schools such as Thames would receive more funding, but others decided that bussing their children across town when they often attended another majority black school made little sense. To assure that all schools received equal treatment, a biracial committee monitored the transition. Class and racial segregation further increased because throughout the nineties, the pattern of black middle class exodus to private schools like Sacred Heart, a Catholic school, and white flight and some black middle class flight to secular academies, private Christian schools, or to Petal and Lamar County persisted. By the turn of the

⁶² Quoting, *Johnny DuPree et al. v. Mike Moore* (October Term, 1996), case no. 96 669, Supreme Court of the United States, 1996 U.S. Briefs 669; 1996 U.S. S. Ct. Briefs LEXIS 1284. *Johnny DuPree, et al. v. Ray Mabus, et al. The Lamar County Board of Education and Trustees and the Forrest County School District and Trustees* (1993), case no. H90-0043(W), United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, Hattiesburg Division, 831 F. Supp. 1310; 1993 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 14181; Denise Berkhalter, "Residents Urge Superintendent to Back Off," *Hattiesburg American*, June 11, 1996; Cathy Hayden, "Court Stalls Annexation of School by Hattiesburg," *Hattiesburg American*, July 31, 1996; Eddie Holloway, interview; Forrest County schools, Hattiesburg schools, and Lamar County schools, Operating agency name, <http://schools.publicschoolsreport.com/Mississippi>.

century, the city schools had become predominantly black and poor.⁶³

The trend devastated Holloway, as he argued that the flight of whites and the black middle class led to the deterioration of city schools. He viewed the black landscape through the prism of a philosophy analogous to W. E. B. DuBois's talented tenth doctrine in which the strongest African Americans uplifted the weakest. During the Jim Crow era, because Mississippi's medical, law, and professional schools were closed to blacks, most of "the best and the brightest African Americans became teachers and preachers." Segregation ensured that Jim Crow's children had the smartest blacks living in their communities and cultivating their minds and spirits. In the post-civil rights era, black professionals acquired a vast multitude of opportunities for success and few chose the lower paying teaching careers. Most of them fled black neighborhoods to grasp opportunities once reserved for whites. Still, Holloway had held out hope that if the city leaders could preserve school integration, they would prevent the black poor from suffering detachment from working and middle class values. He grew frustrated over the aggressive approach of the Second Movement, for, as he expected, it accelerated the flight of whites and the black bourgeois from the schools. The twin developments of racial and class segregation and economic shifts birthed a destitute black underclass locked in a cycle of poverty. The historic black neighborhoods and the schools lost their talented tenth core and their compass to black uplift. Without integration, the schools and

⁶³ Charles Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 222; Monica P. Carter, "Neighborhood Schools," *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1998; Monica P. Carter, "Hattiesburg Forms Biracial Committee," *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1998; Monica P. Carter, "School Plan," *Hattiesburg American*, March 28, 1998; Eddie Holloway, interview.

the neighborhoods would continue to deteriorate.⁶⁴

In contrast, the Second Movement had only reinforced Reverend Siggers perception of the black underclass as a symptom of the failed experiment with integration. In a philosophy similar to Booker T. Washington and Malcolm X, he argued that a society that was separate and truly equal would have prevented the downward spiral of the inner cities. Integration destroyed black capitalism as it rendered most blacks economically dependent on whites, and it fragmented the black community. Because whites had controlled integration and ensured that it occurred in a manner that favored whites, it changed the space blacks and whites shared, but it failed to alter the power base. At least during Jim Crow, blacks had built vibrant close-knit communities and flourishing businesses. As the black middle class fled the inner city and as blacks patronized white-owned businesses, the old neighborhoods deteriorated, and black businesses vanished. Deprived of economic opportunities for black uplift, some blacks turned to illegal ventures. Siggers concluded that the sale of illicit drugs was the only prosperous black-owned business in the ghetto. Thus, gangs and drugs attracted many black youths which led to spiraling crime in the inner city.⁶⁵ Perhaps because white racism was harsher in Laurel, many black leaders developed similar perceptions to Siggers.

When Laurel experienced its battles over annexation and school district consolidation, blacks rather than whites opposed it because they feared that consolidation would dilute, if not, divest their power over their children's education. The battles over

⁶⁴ Eddie Holloway, interview.

⁶⁵ Arthur Siggers, interview.

the schools had long before poisoned racial relations in Jones County. In the 1950s and 1960s, whites had launched a political war to prevent it, and when they lost in 1970, they ravaged the peace by mistreating black students, administration, and faculty. Throughout the integration experiment, most whites refused to regard blacks as equal partners in the schools. White-rule had been toxic to blacks, and they determined that only when they controlled the schools could they heal them and make them safe for their children. They were certain that the white establishment would control the new consolidated district by ensuring whites acquired the dominant power in the superintendent's office, on the school board, in the administration, and on the faculty and staff just as they had during the 1970 implementation of *Brown* through the *Alexander* ruling. Whites had given them no reason to think otherwise, particularly as they had planned and proceeded with consolidation in a secretive manner. Upon learning of the city's annexation ordinance petition in the fall of 1987, black leaders tried to prevent the consolidation by lobbying their political leaders, but to no avail. On August 25, 1988, Judge Brit Singletary approved the annexation ordinance and ordered the board to dissolve the Laurel School District and merge it with the Jones County School District in order to achieve a unitary and desegregated public school system.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Jeannette Edwards, "Black Youths Pay Price of Integration," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 16, 2004; Johnny Magee, interview; Dennis Kevyrn, interview; Cora Wade-Seals, interview, May 5, 2009, MOHP recording; Melinda Gholson, "Laurel Blacks Pickett," *Hattiesburg American*, October 28, 1987, Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM; Petition for Removal, City of Laurel, *Mississippi v. City of Laurel School Board of Education; Jones County School Board of Education; Shady Grove Water Works Association Inc., Sharon Water Works Association. Inc.; and, Calhoun Water Works Association, Inc.* (1987), case no. H87-0245R, attached to case file, *City of Laurel Board v. Jones County School Board*, case no. 87-245, Transfer No. 021920367, Box No. 28, Location No. 10071973, NARA; *United States of American and Laurel-Jones County Branch of the NAACP, et al. v. State of Mississippi and Laurel Municipal Separate*

That night, the Laurel school board met with its attorney, Richard Yoder, in a closed session to formally accept the judge's ruling. Rumors of the secret meeting, however, had reached the NAACP and before the council could vote, Manuel Jones and several other NAACP members burst into the room. They focused their ire on white board member David Massey because they believed Mayor Lindsey had appointed him for the sole purpose of facilitating consolidation. When Superintendent Sheppard contacted police, Jones left as he had no interest in wasting NAACP money on his bail. Once behind closed doors, the white board members, holding the majority vote, agreed to the dissolution of the Laurel district. Immediately after the secret session, the board held a public forum to officially complete the dissolution. Blacks had flocked to the meeting, and when Massey motioned for dissolution, they tried to shout him down. White board member Buzz Tanner seconded the motion over the vociferous protests of the crowd. Enraged, black board member Reverend Johnny Anderson accused the board of making the decision in secret and called it "racist." The crowd burst into cheers. Nevertheless, the board passed the motion with the support of the three whites. The following day, the predominantly white Jones County school board unanimously voted in favor of consolidation. District officials scheduled the Laurel and Jones districts to complete consolidation by July 1, 1989. These officials hoped that a swift transition would dissipate the passionate opposition of the black community. It did not.⁶⁷

School Districts, case nos. 4706, H87-0245(L), United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, 719 F. Supp. 1364; 1989 U. S. Dist. LEXIS 10051; "Laurel School District Dissolves," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 26, 1988; Joe Norman, interview.

⁶⁷ Quoting, "Laurel School District Dissolves," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 26, 1988. Nikki Davis Maute, "Opponents Cry Racism," *Hattiesburg American*, August 26,

The Jones County NAACP hired Hattiesburg attorney Michael Adelman to represent four Laurel school students—Manuel Jones Jr. (son of NAACP president Manuel Jones), Felicia Wheeler (daughter of NAACP member Jean Wheeler), and Kelly and Tabith Anderson (children of black school board member Johnny Anderson). Adelman filed a lawsuit against the city of Laurel on the grounds that the original annexation petition never requested consolidation; Judge Singletary never held a hearing on consolidation to allow proponents and opponents to present evidence in the case; the Department of Justice never cleared the consolidation effort; and the children affected by the court order never had representation in court. Adelman also pointed out that consolidation meant the nullification of the Laurel school board which possessed two black members, Barbara Brumfield-Pruitt and Reverend Anderson, and the county board only had one black board member. Consolidation would rob the black community of its voice in education.⁶⁸

The NAACP moved beyond legal protest and took its fight to the streets. Earl Shinhoster, the NAACP regional director, launched the rallying cry for the struggle when he declared, “no consolidation without representation.” Some 300 people attended an NAACP mass meeting and responded with enthusiasm. Black ministers across Laurel declared their support for the NAACP’s efforts to oppose consolidation. In mid-September, some 300 people—mostly children—marched through the streets of Laurel,

1988, Jones County 1985-1994 Vertical File, McCain, USM; Dana Gower, “NAACP May Attempt to Stop Dissolution,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 26, 1988; Rachel Griffin, “School Board,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 27, 1988; “Mason Answers School Merger Questions,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 26, 1988.

⁶⁸ Janet Braswell, “NAACP Wants Merger Retracted,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 3, 1988, Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM; James Jones interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008, MOHP recording.

wielding signs that asked, “How Far Will Your Children Be Bused?” The march ended in a voter registration drive at the Jones County Courthouse. In February 1989, Judge Tom Lee ruled that the NAACP could intervene in the consolidation case. The case grew increasingly complicated when the Department of Justice sided with city of Laurel and the new consolidated school district against the NAACP because this time the NAACP was opposing integration.⁶⁹

In June 1989, the case finally came to trial before Judge Lee in the U.S. District Court in Hattiesburg. The Department of Justice presented a series of witnesses who testified that illegal guardianships had led to the re-segregation of the Laurel and Jones County schools. Whites, they showed, had used addresses of white relatives or friends in the county in order to attend the majority white county schools. Blacks living in the county, but wanting to attend the Laurel schools, employed the same practice in reverse. Several white students and their parents admitted from the witness stand that they had used illegal guardianships to attend Jones County schools. One parent even confessed that he had obtained the aid of the superintendent to avoid sending his child to Laurel schools. Teachers from Jones County schools named 56 students who lived in Laurel but attended county schools, and the lawyers for the defense noted they had a list of 398 illegal guardianships under investigation. Still, the NAACP perceived the consolidation efforts as racist, mainly because it struck at black political power over predominantly

⁶⁹ First quote, Dana Gower, “NAACP Director Vows Not to Quit on Merger Battle,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 14, 1988; second quote, Dana Gower, “NAACP March,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 13, 1988. Dana Gower, “About 300 March,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 17, 1988; Susan Bartran, “NAACP Can Intervene,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 14, 1988; “Laurel Schools Among Those in Federal Probe,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1989, all in Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM.

black schools. Manuel Jones testified that Jones County remained a bastion of white supremacy. The county schools had lacked a single black principal, and consolidation divested blacks of power, influence, and representation in the new school district.⁷⁰

In late July, Judge Lee stressed the irony that the NAACP had interceded in the case to sustain predominantly black schools and support segregation rather than to prevent it. He noted that the Laurel school district had more money to spend on its teachers, students, and facilities than Jones County because of its tax base, but he also pointed out that in recent years, Laurel had been steadily losing its tax base. Consequently, in terms of longevity, the Laurel schools and the Jones County schools would certainly benefit from consolidation. Unifying the districts would eliminate the administrative costs of the dual system and result in a more efficient management and budget while also integrating the student body. Despite such arguments, Judge Lee ruled that because the defendants had failed to present enough records proving a pattern of illegal guardianship to avoid integration, he had no choice but to rule against consolidation.⁷¹

The failure of school consolidation not only increased the trend of white flight,

⁷⁰ Shirley Schofield, "Jones Students Staked Out by School Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, June 2, 1989; Virginia Burkhalter, "Testimony Begins," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 2, 1989; Virginia Burkhalter, "Court Hears About Guardianship Cases," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 3, 1989; Shirley Schofield, "Son OK'd to Go to Jones School," *Hattiesburg American*, June 20, 1989; Shirley Schofield, "NAACP Cries Racism," *Hattiesburg American*, June 21, 1989; Virginia Burkhalter, "NAACP Merger Would Hurt Blacks," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 21, 1989.

⁷¹ *United States of American and Laurel-Jones County Branch of the NAACP, et al. v. State of Mississippi and Laurel Municipal Separate School Districts*, Civil Action Nos. 4706, H87-0245(L), United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, 719 F. Supp. 1364; 1989 U. S. Dist. LEXIS 10051. Eloria Newell, "Judge Denies Merger of City, County Schools," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 29, 1989.

but it intensified racial divisiveness. Most blacks considered white flight evidence of white racism in Jones County. Yet whites emphasized that black opposition to the school district consolidation proved that black racism was also a problem. Blacks retorted that they supported integration, but they argued that the white-controlled desegregation of the schools in the 1970s had taught blacks that when integration occurred under white terms, blacks suffered. Blacks also tended to perceive Jones County as haunted and infested with white racists who still mourned the death of Jim Crow. They cited the refusal of white politicians to remove a relic of Jim Crow—the segregated drinking fountains—from the Ellisville courthouse in Jones County as proof of their accusations.⁷²

In 1989, a quarter of a century after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the fountains marked “white” and “colored” were not only a shocking reminder of a bygone era of racial oppression, but the fierce protection of them by the white citizenry revealed that the fealty toward the ideologies of white absolutism thrived still in the hearts of far too many white residents. The fountains were erected in 1908—a year after the courthouse was built. Despite the demise of Jim Crow in the 1960s, no official had ever bothered to remove them. To most blacks, the old fountains represented the white supremacist tyranny that they had suffered under as children. The sight of them tore at old wounds and stirred the all too familiar rage born of racial humiliation. For decades blacks had complained to the NAACP about the fountains, and in early April 1989, NAACP President Manuel Jones demanded that the Jones County Supervisors remove the racist relics. Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of History and

⁷² James Jones, interviews; Manuel Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, February 22, 2006, MOHP recording. Susan Vincent, interview, by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009; Anthony Wheat, interview, by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010, MOHP recordings.

Archives Elbert Hilliard offered to facilitate their removal to a museum. At the board of supervisors meeting, Jerome Wyatt, the sole black supervisor, motioned for acceptance of Hilliard's offer, but the white supervisors, with the exception of Thurman Dykes' abstention, voted to place a plaque on the fountains beneath the words "white" and "colored" that explained their historical significance.⁷³

The Jones County NAACP responded with outrage, and Manuel Jones called the supervisors' vote reflective of the persistent racism in Jones County. NAACP members, including numerous children, began picketing the courthouse in July and vowed to continue the protest until the county removed the fountains. The demonstrations drew national attention. Undaunted by the negative publicity, President of the Board of Supervisors Melton Saul remained firm about the supervisors' decision. Some whites in the city, including Judge Charles Pickering, worked with a biracial committee and the supervisors to bring a resolution to the problem. Ultimately, they covered the words "colored" and "white" with bronze plaques that simply stated, "Jones County Courthouse 1908," and Jones terminated the protest. Still, the hostility remained. It enraged blacks that many whites wanted to keep the segregationist fountains at the courthouse rather than remove them to a museum where such archaic visions of racial oppression belonged, and it revealed that white supremacy still reigned in the hearts of many.⁷⁴

⁷³ Quoting Kelly Carson, "Racist Relics Offend Couple," *Hattiesburg American*, April 8, 1989; "Jones Supervisors Reject Offer to Replace Fountain," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 8, 1989, "Jones Fountains," *Hattiesburg American*, April 7, 1989, all in, Jones County, 1985-1989 Vertical File, McCain, USM.

⁷⁴ Quoting Kelly Carson, "New Brass Plaques Hung on Ellisville Fountains," *Hattiesburg American*, November 2, 1989. "Decision to Keep Fountains Angers NAACP," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 9, 1989; Kelly Carson, "NAACP Will March Around Segregated Fountains," *Hattiesburg American*, August 13, 1989; Nikki Davis

That fall, white leaders fanned racial animosity when black and white leaders recreated the separate school districts and reconstituted the county and city school boards. On the county level, the majority white supervisors planned to ensure white dominance on the school board when they redrew the school district lines. The sole black supervisor, Jerome Wyatt, presented a proposal that would include a black majority district. Reverend E. W. Sanders, the only African American on the board before consolidation, informed the supervisors that federal law required some minority representation on boards representing the people. He insisted that as whites would never understand the needs of the black community, the board must include black members to fight for the interest of black students. Blacks lost the fight. The white supervisors ignored black concerns and drew district lines so that not a single black majority district existed. By 1991, no blacks served on the county school board.⁷⁵

Blacks ultimately relinquished to whites the county school battleground, and they focused their fight on the domination of Laurel schools; they confronted many obstacles. During the battle for consolidation, the 1989 summer election delivered to city hall one of the most divided and unpopular governing bodies in Laurel's history. Henry Bucklew,

Maute, "'White' Fountain Vandalized," *Hattiesburg American*, April 10, 1989; Nikki Davis Maute, "Ellisville Residents' March Draws National Attention," *Hattiesburg American*, August 16, 1989; Kelly Carson, "Jones County Officials Rim Over Fountains," *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 1989; Manuel Jones, interview.

⁷⁵ Paul Le'Mone Williams, "School Board May Dilute Black Voting Strength," *The Informer Newsletter*, April 1990, Laurel, 1990 Vertical File, McCain, USM; Frank Williamson, "City School Board Looks at Reorganization," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 14, 1990; *Jones County School Board Minutes, 1991*, Jones County School District Office, Ellisville, Mississippi. The minutes show that in 1991 Bert Martineau rather than Reverend Sanders served as the school board member from Ward 5; School Board Members, Jones County School District website: <http://www.jones.k12.ms.us/District/schoolboard.html>.

despite the many scandals that stained his tenures as mayor in the sixties and in the early eighties, defeated incumbent Mayor Lindsay. Bucklew's third term became mired in controversy as he quarreled constantly with newly-elected Republican council president Joe Norman and clashed with several of his directors and with council members over the proper balance of power in city government. Furthermore, weeks after ward seven constituents reelected African American Councilwoman Viola Malone, police charged her with conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Because she insisted she was innocent, she remained on the racially-divided council while she awaited her trial. Political ideologies also divided the races on the council. All the white council members, including incumbent Councilman Roy Moss, oil executive Joe Norman, former city executive William Farr, and retired supervisor for Mississippi Power Company O. O. Price, were Republicans. Moss had switched parties since his first election to the council. All the black council members including incumbents Malone and George Gaddy and newly elected councilman of ward six James Jones, a World War II veteran, were Democrats. Although Norman crossed racial lines and voted with blacks when an issue concerned the black community, racial tension on the council often exploded into vitriolic fracasas.⁷⁶

To worsen matters, Cable Access Television began broadcasting council meetings on public television, which, according to some residents, led to a degeneration of the system as council members began posturing for the cameras to prove to their constituents that they were fighting for their every last interest, even when that interest harmed the

⁷⁶ "Mayor, 7 Council Members Run City of Laurel," *Hattiesburg American*, May 13, 1990, Laurel Government Vertical File, McCain USM; Eloria Newell, "Viola Malone Gets Her Day in Court," November 5, 1990, Viola Malone Vertical File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM]; Melinda Gholson, "Bucklew Recaptures Leadership," *Hattiesburg American*, June 7, 1989; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008; Joe Norman, interview.

city. On one occasion, Mayor Bucklew became so enraged over his inability to control many of the council members that he had Norman arrested on frivolous charges. On another occasion, a white councilman flew across the room, grabbed James Jones by his neck, and strangled him. The other council members tried to pull him off of Jones, but he would not let go until Jones managed to push his chair back to the floor, forcing the man to lose his grip. The councilman claimed that he attacked Jones because he was tired of his long harangue for the camera. Jones, however, considered racism the motivator. Jones had left Laurel in 1943 when he was drafted into the war. After V-Day, he spent decades in Europe and later California working for the federal government. When he returned to Laurel in the 1984 to care for his ailing mother, he was shocked by the prejudice that was still rampant in his hometown. He had never forgotten the suffering he had experienced under Jim Crow, like the day a policeman arrested him because he referred to his own mother as Mrs. Jones—a courtesy title reserved for whites. As a veteran who had fought in the 761st Tank Battalion as part of the first all-black armored unit sent into combat in the war, Jones grew frustrated that in his hometown, he still confronted racist whites, and he still had to fight for his equality.⁷⁷

The fight over the school board intensified Jones' anger. When the city reconstructed the Laurel school district, most citizens assumed that the former board members would return to service. Problems quickly emerged, however, as one white member, Buzz Tanner, had moved out of Laurel; the term of black member Reverend Anderson had expired; and police arrested the most controversial white member, David

⁷⁷ James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008; Joe Norman, interview; Susan Vincent, interview; Henry Bucklew, Joe Norman, Don Bullock Vertical Files, LRM; Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Battalion, WWII'S Forgotten Heroes* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 151, xiii.

Massey, on charges of possession of cocaine and ecstasy with the intent to distribute.

Massey pled guilty to several of the charges and resigned from the board. NAACP leader Manuel Jones demanded that Mayor Bucklew fill all three vacancies with African Americans. Instead, Bucklew, with the city council's unanimous approval, appointed two white men, and he neglected to reappoint or replace Anderson. Jones angrily denounced the appointments. Blacks won the lawsuit to sustain separate districts, but they were losing the battle to dominate the administration of the schools. The superintendent, the administration, the board, and the faculty were majority white even though the school was majority black.⁷⁸

In the summer of 1990, Mayor Bucklew tried to appease the black community when he appointed African American Lee T. Donaldson to Anderson's seat. Instead, the appointment split the black community and the council. White member Norman joined James Jones and Gaddy and voted against the appointment of Donaldson, but Malone along with the two white council members voted in favor of him while one white member abstained. A change in the council reinvigorated the fight to ensure Anderson his old seat on the board. That November, a jury convicted Malone on the drug charges which forced her to resign her council seat. In January 1991, Justice William Barbour sentenced Malone to 21 months in prison. Ward seven constituents elected Melvin Mack, a

⁷⁸ Eloria Newell, "Massey Pleads Guilty," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 25, 1990; Eloria Newell, "NAACP Calls for Black Majority on City School Board," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 4, 1989, Laurel, 1925-85 Vertical File, McCain, USM; City Council Meeting, February 14, 1990, *Minutes City Council, City of Laurel*, vol. 60, 492, 498-499, Office of the City Clerk, City Hall, Laurel, Mississippi ; Frank Williamson, "City School Board Requests," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 14, 1990, Scott Willis, "NAACP Questions Appointments," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 21, 1990; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008; "Jones Co. NAACP Wants Blacks on School Board," *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 1989; Eloria Newell, "Massey Enters Not Guilty Plea" *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 7, 1990; Susan Vincent, interview.

salesman from Sears, to replace Malone. Mack, a deeply-principled and ambitious man, had harbored political dreams since his childhood years when he had participated in some of the civil rights protests. Soon after he took his council seat, the NAACP, which was 500 members strong, increased pressure on the mayor and the council to return Anderson to the school board. Finally, in April 1992, Mayor Bucklew reappointed Anderson, and the council unanimously confirmed him.⁷⁹

During the controversy over school board appointments, blacks launched a battle over the school board's proposed consolidation of Laurel's seven elementary schools into four. Superintendent Sheppard and some African Americans, including Barbara Brumfield-Pruitt, the school board president, supported consolidation because it would cut excessive costs, particularly bussing. Of the four schools, only Mason would become majority white. Manuel Jones and NAACP members opposed it because they worried that the board would ensure that Mason would receive the best technology and faculty. Jones argued that the plan violated the 1970 desegregation orders. Education Chairman of the local NAACP Jane Wheeler also rejected the plan as she declared: "we have defeated segregation and we do not desire to go back to segregation." Of course, the NAACP had supported segregation in the entire Laurel-Jones districts consolidation affair, and segregation had won. The NAACP had reversed its argument, but maintained the same

⁷⁹ Melinda Gholson, "Malone Gets 21 Months in Jail," *Hattiesburg American*, January 10, 1991, Malone Vertical File, LRM; City Council Meeting, July 3, 1990, *Minutes City Council, City of Laurel*, vol. 61, 253-255, August 14, 1990, 368-370, August 21, 1990, 392-393; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008; Joe Norman, interview; *Minutes City Council, City of Laurel*, vol. 63, April 21, 1992, 719; "NAACP President Answers Charges," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 5, 1990, NAACP Vertical File, LRM; Melinda Gholson, "Laurel Councilwoman Convicted on Cocaine Charges," *Hattiesburg American*, November 10, 1990, Malone Vertical File, LRM; Eloria Newell, "Mack Ready For Challenge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 3, 1991, Melvin Mack Vertical File, LRM.

motivation—blacks must sustain the greatest power over black dominated schools and ensure that black students have access to the best facilities and equipment.⁸⁰

The Department of Justice rejected the consolidation plan because it created racially identifiable schools with Stainton possessing a 97 percent black population, Oak Park 98 percent, and Nora Davis 82 percent while Mason would become 75 percent white. In late April, the board developed an “option schools” arrangement in which it would assign students to their neighborhood schools but provide them the option of attending a different school when slots opened. The four schools would all receive equitable funding. In mid-May, the NAACP endorsed the plan. The Department of Justice, however, rejected the plan because it created racially segregated schools. Persistent white flight led to the development of racially identifiable schools anyhow. By that point, no one could save the integrated schools, as the racial battles had scarred the city and stunted all efforts toward racial reconciliation. White flight continued.⁸¹

In 1954, the NAACP had launched the Movement with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and many hoped the landmark decision to integrate public schools would have a domino affect, destroying forever segregation. In the Central Piney Woods that

⁸⁰ Quoting Frank Williamson, “NAACP Opposes City School Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 9, 1990; Frank Williamson, “NAACP Again Rejects Reorganization Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 20, 1990; Kelly Carson, “NAACP Fights School Changes in Laurel,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 18, 1990, Laurel 1990 Vertical File, McCain, USM.

⁸¹ Quoting Scott Willis, “Laurel District Eyes ‘Option School’ Approach,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 28, 1990. “NAACP Endorses Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 18, 1990; Frank Williamson, “Justice Rejects School Reorganization Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 29, 1990; Frank Williamson, “Justice Rejects School Reorganization Plan,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 15, 1990; Enrollment by Grade/Race/Gender 2007/2008, Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System, Office of Research and Statistics, Mississippi Department of Education <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/ORS/DAADF.htm>.

effort died in the late 1980s with the response to the *Pittman* case in Hattiesburg and the *NAACP v. Laurel* case in Jones County. During the Movement, the massive white resistance to school integration and the intense mistreatment and discrimination blacks confronted under the white supremacist implementation of the *Brown* and *Alexander* rulings suffocated historical opportunities to build a biracial society founded on integration of children. Rather than becoming biracial forums where teachers and administrators guided black and white children to develop friendships across racial lines that would later help them foster a cooperative biracial society as adults, the schools became racially divided institutions in which children learned to distrust those persons outside their race and perpetuated the divided society that birthed and raised them. As blacks gained power in the post civil-rights era, they tried to equalize the power in the schools in hopes of fostering racial reconciliation and racial equality, but still they faced resistance. The white flight that ensued convinced many black leaders that whites would endure school integration only if whites controlled it. Additionally, they realized that the same attitude applied to every other aspect of their communities.

In Hattiesburg, the leaders of CIAFC had launched the Second Movement in hopes of forcing whites to share power with blacks in the schools, and they built on that struggle to achieve shared power in the economic life of the community. The persistent white resistance to their efforts combined with a fight over racial injustice in the 1990s convinced many of them that as long as whites retained power over Hattiesburg, blacks would never become equal citizens. Jones County blacks had already reached a similar conclusion after whites refused to meet with black activists and compromise over black demands in their school battles. By the onset of the 1990s,

black leaders in Laurel and the CIAFC nucleus in Hattiesburg had shifted their mission from black inclusion to black dominance over their cities. Throughout the Second Movement, the traditional black leaders in Hattiesburg, including Holloway and Lawrence, disagreed with the aggressive style of the CIAFC as it alienated whites and drove them from the city and the schools. However, as the struggle progressed, Lawrence changed his mind. He later compared the role of the CIAFC to that of Socrates in Athens, as he noted, “If you don’t have a gadfly, if you don’t have somebody to stir up something, then you won’t ever have change.”⁸² At the onset of the 1990s, the CIAFC nucleus and the black leaders in Laurel prepared for a much larger battle, as they decided that inciting whites to reexamine their society had failed to transform it. Instead, they had to uproot white supremacy by attacking its power base and reversing it. The time had come for a great racial reckoning.

⁸² Charles Lawrence, interview.

CHAPTER XIII

RECKONINGS: THE ROAD TO JUSTICE AND REDEMPTION

The French painter Georges Braque once proclaimed that “truth exists, only falsehood has to be invented.” As blacks and whites fought over the state of racial justice in the Central Piney Woods, their battles reflected more the musings of French author Gustave Flaubert who argued that “there is no truth. There is only perception.”¹ When the conversation turned toward race on the black side of the color line, many blacks blamed whites for racial hostilities that erupted over crime waves, police crackdowns, fracas in the fire department, and Klan cold cases. Whites still controlled city hall, the courts, and the police and fire departments, and according to black activists, they used that power to oppress blacks. The former Klansman who had murdered Vernon Dahmer still lived in their midst, and white authorities stymied efforts to reopen the cold case. They perceived the white-run police departments as infested with white supremacist officers who treated all blacks as criminals, beat black suspects with impunity, and terrorized black neighborhoods. White citizens paraded their devotion to white supremacy by defending Confederate symbols and justifying white violence. Blacks would never achieve racial justice until blacks ran their towns.

On the white side of the color line, not a few whites blamed rising black crime rates and reverse racism for the racial turmoil that blanketed their towns. According to many whites, black gangs took over the inner cities and spread violence and drugs across the Central Piney Woods. Black leaders levied false accusations of brutality

¹ First quote, Georges Braque, Georges Braque, Discover France, <http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Art/Braque.shtml> (accessed November 2010); second quote, attributed to Gustave Flaubert based on his themes in Gustave Flaubert *Madame Bovary* (New York, Penguin Books, 2010).

against law enforcement officers, used the Dahmer case to ignite black rage, and gerrymandered district lines to create black-dominated cities to instigate a reversal of racial power. They even sought to eviscerate southern culture by eradicating celebrations of the Confederacy. Black leaders used race card politics to condemn whites who disagreed with them and to denounce as Uncle Toms those blacks who sided with whites on any issue. In such a belligerent milieu, whites could only save their towns from decay by sustaining white control over their towns.

Throughout the Central Piney Woods, the road to redemption was besotted by eruptions of racial unrest, but it was also infused with hope as integrationists sought to relight the torch of racial progression. During the early 1990s, conflicting perceptions pitted many whites and blacks against each other once again. Distrust of power and fear of powerlessness inspired the disparate racial souls of the Central Piney Woods to seek dominance over each other rather than union. However, during the latter half of the decade, some whites and blacks reached across the racial divide by trying to perceive each conflict from the other side of the color line. As they came closer to understanding each other, they sought biracial solutions to interracial struggles. So, while some whites argued that the Jim Crow days had long passed, and it was time to bury old ghosts, other whites joined blacks in a fight for racial justice as they resurrected the tragic past and struggled for retributive justice for the dead and equal justice for the living. And while some blacks embraced black separatist politics as the only means of terminating racial oppression, others worked with whites to build biracial governments that were fair and sensitive to both races. Both the biracial

struggles and the polarized battles forced the citizenry to confront the racial divide in great reckonings that thrust the Central Piney Woods on the road toward redemption.

The most turbulent racial battles in Hattiesburg arose over the rise of crime and the police crackdowns in the inner city. Since the economic shifts of the post civil rights era, many poor blacks across the Central Piney Woods were trapped in ghettos wracked by abject poverty, gangs, illegal narcotics, and the perpetual War on Drugs. Many children born into the inner-city war zones would never escape the cyclical sufferings. Gangs emerged in Hattiesburg in the 1980s when gang members from California and Chicago migrated to Mississippi to live with relatives. Police estimated that as of 1994, 500 blacks had joined local gangs that were derivatives of the national organizations, the Bloods and the Crips. Several of these gangs spread to Laurel. Local gangs never launched the massive gangland wars that terrorized black communities in metropolitan areas like Los Angeles and Chicago, but blacks in the Central Piney Woods' inner cities considered their streets terrifying because they resided among violent gangs, and they struggled to keep their children safe from stray bullets and gang recruiters. Unlike most whites, however, they understood the inner city despair that led some black children to seek love and respect inside a violent brotherhood. And unlike whites, many blacks feared the police more than gangs because they argued that law enforcement crackdowns had resulted in the terrorization of their neighborhoods.²

² Our View, "City Must Face Gang Problem," *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Tension Shrouds Williams' Funeral," *Hattiesburg American*, April 23, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Brotherhood or Criminal Band?" *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; "Experts: Violence Can Hit Anywhere," *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; "USM Student Sees Deadly Effect of Violence," *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; Eloria Newell James, "Residents of Laurel" *Hattiesburg American*, April 22,

The Hattiesburg Police Department had transformed from the Jim Crow era when the radical white supremacist mentality governed law enforcement. Its chiefs and most of its top officers lacked the racist worldviews of their forebears. Nevertheless, like departments across the nation, it functioned under a new system of criminal control that had a racist affect—the War on Drugs. As civil rights litigator and scholar Michelle Alexander argues convincingly in *The New Jim Crow*, the war ensured that many poor blacks remained locked into an “*undercaste*,” marginalized and unable to compete in the American mainstream on an equal playing field. Other scholars employ the term underclass to refer to the impoverished state of poor blacks in the inner cities; however, Alexander shows that because the War on Drugs led to mass incarceration of African Americans and transformed inner cities into war zones, the black underclass descended into an *undercaste*—a state of poverty and despair from which few would escape. The War on Drugs would have no such affect on most whites even though they abused and sold drugs at far higher percentage rates.³ To understand how police departments lacking racist leadership could enforce a racist drug war, it is necessary to briefly examine the intent, structure, and fallout of the federal war that spread across the nation.

Alexander reveals that when white conservative politicians masterminded the federal War on Drugs in 1980, they ensured that it would target inner city blacks rather than suburban or rural whites for one specific reason—mass incarceration of blacks would replace Jim Crow as the system of racial control. Alexander proves through an

1994; Janet Braswell, “Gang Violence Constant Threat,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 29, 1994; Brian Livingston, “Evidence of Gangs,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 2, 2006.

³ Quoting Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 13; *Ibid.*, 5-19, 51-57.

army of statistical evidence that although the lucrative drug trade attracted more whites and that whites comprised the largest percentage of sellers and abusers of illegal narcotics, they were far less likely to be arrested or imprisoned for drug crimes than their black counterparts. According to a 2000 report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, white and black youths used marijuana at relatively the same rates; however, whites abused cocaine and heroin at seven times the rate of their black counterparts, and whites used crack cocaine at eight times the rate of blacks. The 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse revealed that white youths between the ages of 12 to 17 were three times more likely to have dealt illegal narcotics than their black counterparts. White youths were also hospitalized in the emergency room for drug use at three times the rate of black youths. Finally, white professionals represented the group most likely to participate in illegal narcotic activity in their lifetime.⁴

According to such statistics, the logic follows that law enforcement would have centered its war in white communities. Indeed, SWAT teams could have dropped from helicopters into suburban neighborhoods or college campuses to hold white families or white fraternity boys at gunpoint while they tore apart their homes in search of drugs. Police officers and federal agents could have confiscated white-owned homes based on forfeiture laws that allowed them to seize property and assets when they found a small amount of drugs in the dwelling, even if the parents had no knowledge that their son or daughter was hiding drugs on their property. Officers could have occupied white neighborhoods, harassed white teenagers hanging out on their blocks, and forced white boys and girls to lay facedown on the ground while they patted them down for drugs.

⁴ Ibid., 13, 47, 56-57, 97, 101, 103, 192.

Millions of white men could have disappeared from their society when authorities locked them in cages for minor drug offenses; they could have become lifelong felons consigned to an *undercaste* because they had engaged in recreational drug use or had sold a small amount of drugs to their friends. Surely, such developments would have galvanized white communities to use their political and economic power to terminate the drug war and end the political careers of its architects. Of course, it never happened. Despite the statistics that proved whites used and sold drugs at much higher rates, three-fourths of persons sent to prison for drug crimes were black or Hispanic. Moreover, black juveniles were sentenced at six times the rate of their white counterparts for identical crimes.⁵

As Alexander reveals, the architects of the War on Drugs ensured that it functioned as a means of racial control not criminal control through an intricate web of carefully crafted measures. The drug war czars wove the first thread when they launched a massive political campaign in the media in which they portrayed blacks as dangerous drug dealers and strung-out addicts until the images of the black kingpin, black gangs, and black druggies solidified in the white mind. They achieved that goal without explicitly referring to race so as to safeguard the campaign from accusations of racism. Instead they used terms like “welfare queens,” “crack babies,” and “gangbangers” while showing images of blacks rather than whites who fit these stereotypes. The drug war campaign proved so successful that the white public—even many whites lacking conscious racial biases—falsely believed that blacks were the predominant drug offenders and that they were far worse and far more violent than whites who engaged in youthful indiscretions. The drug war czars further pedaled these falsehoods when they

⁵ Ibid., 96, 97, 114, 121-123, 175-176.

claimed that the war targeted most the dealers and users of hard drugs and that most persons imprisoned for drug activity were connected to violent crimes. On the contrary, during the 1990s, arrests for marijuana possession comprised 80 percent of the rise in illegal narcotic arrests. In 2005 four of five persons arrested in the drug war were charged with possession, not dealing. Most inmates incarcerated in state prisons on drug convictions lacked any history of violence. Yet the drug war czars had so successfully spun their tale that they formed in the white mind a new black bogeyman—the black gangbanging drug dealer. They turned this black caricature into public enemy number one by portraying him as a risk to national and domestic security, an enemy who threatened to rip apart the fabric of American society. As whites feared this reinvented black beast, few whites complained when police agencies turned ghettos into war zones and took as their prisoners the black poor.⁶

Once the drug war czars had formed a white public consensus for the war, they needed battalions of state and local law enforcement agents and officers to serve as devoted soldiers on the frontlines. Initially, state agencies, sheriffs, and police chiefs resisted the federal encroachment and disdained the concept of diverting their manpower and resources away from violent criminal investigations and toward drug enforcement. So the drug war czars wove their second thread: they provided cash incentives for law enforcement departments that agreed to make the drug war their top priority, including massive federal grants, federally funded training, access to military equipment, and the right of departments through forfeiture laws to retain 80 percent of assets and property seized in drug raids. Forfeiture laws not only allowed officers to confiscate property and

⁶ Quoting *Ibid.*, 51; *Ibid.*, 47-54, 76, 102-105.

assets if the dealer or drug user owned the dwelling that police raided, it also allowed them to confiscate property if a renter or a child living on that property used or sold drugs. The promise of a massive expansion of state and local budgets, federally funded training opportunities, and free equipment proved too seductive to turn down. Because politicians and media elites had portrayed illegal narcotics as a predominantly black inner city crime, federal training programs taught police departments across America that blacks were the predominant users and sellers of drugs and showed them how to employ behavioral profiling in a manner that encouraged officers to use race and class as a major component in their profiles. In other words, they should target poor blacks. Soon, the drug war czars had the support of battalions of state and local law enforcement agencies for their racially designed War on Drugs.⁷

To advance these battalions steadily into the ghettos, the drug czars needed to eradicate the barricades protecting the civil liberties of the people. Thus, they wove their third thread by convincing the U. S. Congress and the U. S. Supreme Court to pass legislation and implement rulings that together eviscerated constitutional civil liberty protections. Court rulings including *Terry v. Ohio*, *Florida v. Bostick*, and *Whren v. United States* so pillaged the Fourth Amendment protections that it allowed law enforcement officers to function like brigades of secret police with the ability to stop, search, and seize persons and property without probable cause. Courts could ensure long imprisonment for their targets because for example, congressional laws such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act mandated mandatory minimum prison sentences of five to ten years for first-time offenders convicted of low-level possession and distribution of crack cocaine.

⁷ Ibid., 69-81, 100-106, 120-125, 128-133.

In other developed countries, first-time drug offenders faced a maximum of six months in prison, and most never faced prison terms as these nations perceived drug abuse as a public health issue. American liberals had once held similar views. Yet a few years after the war began, poor blacks learned that many liberals who had been their allies in the Civil Rights Movement had abandoned them. White conservatives established the war, but many Democrats, desperate to win back the white working class that fled the party to vote for Ronald Reagan, tried to wrench control of the War on Drugs. For example, President William Clinton helped push through congress the federal three strikes law which mandated life sentences for third-time convictions. As strikes were tallied by individual charges rather than cases, a person charged with three felonies in a single case could languish in prison for life. Consequently, many blacks accused on multiple drug charges served life sentences.⁸

Once politicians, the media, the U. S. Supreme Court, and federal, state, and local law enforcement had turned black drug users and dealers in the ghettos into public enemy number one, the drug war czars wove the fourth thread of their web as they ensured that judicial systems across the nation convicted and incarcerated blacks at a much higher rate than their white counterparts. As the war was predominantly waged in poor black communities, police charged far more blacks than whites with drug crimes. The judicial system denied poor blacks accused of drug crimes access to meaningful legal representation. Police and overburdened public defenders often persuaded blacks to accept plea deals on the threat that the courts would likely convict them and that judges, under mandatory sentencing guidelines, would send them to prison for a long time. Under

⁸ Ibid., 52-56, 60-88, 105-136.

such circumstances, even innocents often pled guilty. Frequently, police and prosecutors coerced co-defendants to become informants, many of whom avoided long prison sentences by fabricating stories that led to the convictions of innocents. Thus, the racially biased system succeeded in incarcerating millions of black men in prison.⁹

The final thread of the racial control web was woven upon the release of drug felons as state and federal laws generally deprived felons of equal citizenship rights. Once released back into their communities, ex-convicts realized that they had become diminished citizens locked inside an *undercaste* as they lacked suffrage rights and were subject to discrimination in education, employment, housing, and public benefits which all but assured that they would turn to criminal activities to survive. So the cycle repeated. In 2010 more blacks were under the control of the prison system through incarceration, probation, or parole than were slaves in 1850. Moreover, more blacks were disfranchised because of felony convictions than their counterparts were in 1870 when Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment to ensure black suffrage. As of 2002, incarceration rates of black men ensured a gender gap between black men and women in the free society of 26 percent which led to the staggering reality that black children were less likely to be raised in a two-parent home in the new millennium than during slavery.

¹⁰

Thus, the war also exacted devastating collateral damage on the larger black community because mass incarceration tore families asunder as it snatched parents away from their children; it ripped apart social systems as it divided the black bourgeois from the black poor; and it ensured the cycle repeated as felons had few opportunities to

⁹ Ibid., 83-91, 104-120, 137-140.

¹⁰ Ibid., 92-94, 141-160, 174-175.

escape poverty and crime. Black fathers and to a lesser degree black mothers languished in prison for committing drug crimes while most of their white counterparts who committed illegal narcotic crimes at far higher percentage rates never suffered for their transgressions. Because many of these black families were broken, their children often turned to gangs for brotherhood and structure. Thus, the War on Drugs turned some of its black targets into gang soldiers. Demonized by the media and police and even by their own communities, gang members embraced their outlaw stigma as a force that bound them together against the reconstituted police state. Racism and the War on Drugs created the explosion of black gang violence rather than the inverse. The children of gang members were born into an *undercaste* as they lacked all the influences necessary to help them escape. And so the cycle repeated.¹¹

The War on Drugs was designed to ensure the protraction of that cycle for its architects had no interest in winning the war, but rather in perpetuating it as a system of racial control. Moreover, they had created a drug war industrial complex comprised of multifarious institutions with an enormous stake in its perpetuity. During the War on Drugs, law enforcement agents and officers arrested 31 million people for drug offenses. As a result of increased arrests, the budgets and manpower of law enforcement agencies exploded. In 2003 the United States spent \$185 billion on police protection, detention, judicial, and legal activities, and it employed 2.4 million people. Between 1980 and 2000, the percentage of persons sent to prison on drug offenses quadrupled. Within 25 years, the prison population exploded from 350,000 to 2.3 million which led to a massive boom of prison building unparalleled in American history. The trend continued in the new

¹¹ Ibid., 160-172, 174-175, 224.

millennium; in 2007, prisons housed over 7 million people. The prison system alone rose to a cost of \$250 billion annually. Proponents of the drug wars falsely claimed that the prison population increased because crime had skyrocketed. Crime rates had not grown since the war began; rather the increase of the prison population was directly due to the War on Drugs and to the increase in prison sentences—mostly mandatory drug sentences. For example, inmates in federal prisons convicted on homicide charges accounted for a 0.4 percent rise of the population whereas inmates convicted on drug charges accounted for 61 percent increase in the population. Moreover, according to conservative estimates, incarceration only reduced recidivism at a rate of 25 percent. Some estimates claimed it only reduced it by 3 percent. Thus, between 75 to 97 percent of ex-convicts engaged in criminal activities soon after their release, and the judicial system returned most of them to prison. The cycle fed the industrial complex and kept it alive and prosperous.¹²

The War on Drugs failed as a system of crime control, but it succeeded as a system of racial control. It cleared millions of blacks off inner city streets and forced them into cells, only to release them years later into an *undercaste* of disfranchised felons who confronted such intense discrimination in employment, education, and housing that many of them turned to criminal activities to survive. Their suffering nearly ensured that their children would never escape the *undercaste* either. The new system of racial control succeeded at a time when racial mentalities across white America had grown more progressive because on the surface the war appeared absent of racial bias and was sold to the public as an effort to stem rising crime.¹³

¹² Ibid., 59, 85-88, 92-93, 99, 218-219, 224-225.

¹³ Ibid., 179-208.

Within the historical context, the racial struggle in Hattiesburg between the police and the black community that erupted in the 1990s had a racist foundation even though many of its executors lacked racial bias. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Hattiesburg Police Department was under the control of a racially fair-minded chief, Keith Oubre, but his department was not immune to the racial biases that had become innate in the national War on Drugs. As the drug war ratcheted to its zenith in Hattiesburg, many poor blacks perceived police officers as a militant occupying force who invaded their communities to intimidate, brutalize, and incarcerate them. The frustrations and devastation that the war ignited across the black communities in Hattiesburg's inner city exploded into rage soon after Reverend Kenneth Fairley assumed the presidency of the Forrest County NAACP. Fairley was a different sort of NAACP leader as he perceived aggressive public confrontations more useful than behind-the-scene diplomacy. He approached the complaints against law enforcement by launching a fiery crusade against the Hattiesburg Police Department and the city's white leaders; his efforts and the department's response engulfed the city in a racial battle that divided blacks and whites and exacerbated racial tensions.

Soon after Hattiesburg rang in the new decade, Reverend Fairley deluged city leaders with a flood of complaints that police were brutalizing black citizens. The first complaint incited passions as it involved a black youth. On January 8, white policemen David Ezell and Robby Weeks approached a group of black teenagers congregating on the Mary Bethune Elementary school campus because they suspected that the youths might be engaging in drug activity. Terrified, the teenagers ran. All of them escaped except 16-year-old "John" Evans who fell. As he scrambled to his feet, he felt the

officer's flashlight smack the back of his skull, and he crumpled to the ground. When Evans' grandfather bailed him out of jail, he found his grandson bleeding and bruised. Evans' parents reported the incident to the local NAACP. Several days later, Officer Scott Morgan and Metro Narcotics Agent Mike Humphrey rushed past nightclubs on Martin Luther King Boulevard toward a parked vehicle occupied by two black men. Humphrey leveled a gun at William Ray Tatum's head and ordered him and his passenger, Robert Washington, to raise their hands above their head. Tatum complied, but Washington fled down the street. The white lawmen quickly captured him, and according to Washington, they beat him. Washington was hospitalized for a week with neck, chest, and head injuries.¹⁴

President of the Forrest County NAACP Reverend Fairley demanded publicly that the city investigate both incidents. In the wake of the publicity, blacks flocked to Fairley's office with so many similar complaints that Fairley accused the HPD of implementing a systematic pattern of police brutality. Fairley became the source of

¹⁴ Janet Braswell, "NAACP's Fairley Lodges Brutality Complaint," *Hattiesburg American*, January 12, 1990; Janet Braswell, "Hattiesburg Man Alleges Policeman Beat Him," *Hattiesburg American*, January 11, 1990; Janet Braswell, "Alleged Victims," *Hattiesburg American*, Jan. 16, 1990; Janet Braswell, "NAACP Criticizes City Council," *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1990, all in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]. Charlie Sims, interview, May 6, 2009; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8, 2009 and May 13, 2009; Wayne Landers, interview, May 6, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12, 2009 and June 10, 2009, all by Patricia Boyett, recordings, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited]. The teenager is referred to as "John" as he was a juvenile and his name was not released.

courage for black complainants as he accompanied them to the HPD headquarters to report their grievances, and he served as their voice as he inundated the media with their stories. During one interview, Fairley ranted that “the descriptions are all the same—the guys are hit in the head with flashlights or blackjacks. After you get people in handcuffs, that’s unnecessary force.” Fairley demanded that Mayor Ed Morgan form an external review board to examine complaints and fire racist officers. According to Fairley, Morgan requested that he give officers “a chance because some of them come in like Rambo . . . but then they mellow out and become good officers.” Fairley responded, “Man, if you’re on the whipping end, you ain’t for giving people some chances.” The NAACP campaign faced a setback in mid-January when Evans’ parents withdrew their complaint. Although Officer Weeks’ wife later accused him of spousal abuse, which revealed he had a violent temper and bolstered the possibility that he had beaten Evans, without the cooperation of the Evans family the NAACP could not pursue an investigation. The Washington case also foundered when the HPD internal investigators dismissed the complaint for lack of evidence. The NAACP crusade against the HPD, however, had only just begun.¹⁵

Perception played a significant role in the battle between the HPD and the NAACP. Most officers of both races perceived complaints as either fabricated or

¹⁵ First quote, Janet Braswell, “NAACP’s Fairley Lodges Brutality Complaint,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 12, 1990, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Janet Braswell, “Alleged Victims,” *Hattiesburg American*, Jan. 16, 1990; Janet Braswell, “NAACP Criticizes City Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1990; Nikki Davis Maute, “Hub Police Officer Suspended After Wife Files Assault Charges,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 22, 1991; Janet Braswell, “Morgan, Fairley Discuss Brutality Charge,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 18, 1990; Janet Braswell, “Hub Clears Policeman of Brutality,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1990 all in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain.

stemming from a misunderstanding of the boundaries of necessary and justifiable force. They emphasized that Chief Keith Oubre had transformed the HPD into a professional institution that recruited more educated officers and required them to take minority relations classes to improve communications with the black community. According to Officers Wayne Landers and Charlie Sims, most officers who held racist views had retired or left the force. Blue was the only color that mattered, and it united officers in a common perspective of policing because of their similar experiences on the street. During these disputes, white citizens tended to believe the officers over the complainants, particularly if the accuser had a criminal record.¹⁶

Contrarily, black citizens tended to believe the accusers—whether or not they had a criminal history—over the officers. Blacks had long perceived the badge and the gavel as forces of racial oppression because during Jim Crow and the Movement years, police, prosecutors, and judges had not only failed to protect African Americans but used their power to suppress their liberties. In the 1980s and 1990s, blacks insisted that police still failed to protect them, that most of them treated all blacks like thugs, and that some officers harassed and brutalized them. According to Fairley, police brutality proved much more pervasive than the HPD would admit. He also claimed that judges perpetuated racial injustice by favoring the HPD in those brutality cases that made it to the courts. Fairley conceded that many complainants had criminal records or were caught in a

¹⁶ Wayne Landers, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 30, 2008, MOHP recording; Billy McGee, interview, May 7, 2009, by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recording.

criminal activity when the beating occurred, but he insisted that police could “enforce the law without brutality.”¹⁷

Two recent tragedies had also shaped the divergent perceptions of policing between officers and the black community. On June 27, 1987 a black teenager called an ambulance when his uncle, Perry Saucier, tried to commit suicide by cutting his throat. After the medics and police arrived, Saucier threatened them with a knife. When Gertrude Stovall, Saucier’s mother, arrived at her house to find it surrounded by police vehicles, she begged the officers to allow her to speak to her son. Saucier, a 22-year-old college student, had never committed a crime, but she worried that a confrontation with police might prove dire because her son had suffered a mental breakdown. Saucier had returned to live with her after receiving treatment for his mental illness at the East Mississippi State Hospital. The officers ignored her pleas and ordered her to remain outside while police handled the situation. Stovall never heard the gun shots, but she saw medics rush her son into the ambulance on a gurney. She followed them to Forrest General Hospital to hear doctors pronounce him dead from two gunshot wounds to the chest. Stovall and many blacks considered the shooting a murder.¹⁸

The NAACP filed a complaint with the Department of Justice prompting FBI

¹⁷ Quoting, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews May 12 and June 10, 2009; Eddie Holloway, interview. Rod Woullard, interview, May 13, 2009; Lillie Easton and Carol Preyor, interview, September 26, 2009; Daisy Harris Wade, interview, September 26, 2009; Cheryl Outlaw, interview, October 2, 2009; Clementine Benton, interview, September 23, 2009; Clarence Magee, interview, September 25, 2009; Douglass T. Baker, interview, September 24, 2009; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview, June 8, 2009, all interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

¹⁸ Janet Braswell, “Shooting Spurs NAACP Probe,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 30, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, “Shooting Sparks Councilman’s Proposal,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 7, 1987.

agents to join the investigation already launched by the district attorney's office. In early July, the HPD declared that Saucier had pointed a knife at the officer and backed him into a corner, and thus, the officer had the right to defend himself. The HPD ruled the shooting a justifiable homicide. Many blacks were furious, and one black man sent a scathing letter of protest to the local paper. He argued that the HPD chiefs routinely allowed officers to attack black citizens, and when officers shot and killed blacks, they suspended the officer with pay for a short period until they ruled the killing a "justifiable homicide." He called the suspension a paid "vacation [and] a slap in the face of blacks and a pat on the back for the cop."¹⁹

Police officers perceived the incident differently, particularly because of a tragic experience with a mentally unstable person several years earlier. On New Years' Eve 1984, Detective Sergeant Jackie Sherrill, Detective John Barnes, and Officers Steve Reid and Tony Davis approached a brick home in Hattiesburg with a warrant to arrest an African American, Noah Wheeler, on sex crime charges. Wheeler's neighbors and family feared the Air Force veteran as he suffered from mental illness. Wheeler's mother had him committed on several occasions, but the hospitals always released him. Detective Sherrill waited in the yard while the officers strode onto the porch and knocked on the latched screen door. When they informed Wheeler that they had a warrant for his arrest, he warned the officers that he would kill them if they tried to arrest him. As Sergeant Barnes yanked open the screen door, breaking its latch, Wheeler bolted toward him so

¹⁹ Quoting John Gilbert, "Here We Go Again," *Hattiesburg American*, July 17, 1987. Janet Braswell, "Shooting Spurs NAACP Probe," *Hattiesburg American*, June 30, 1987; Janet Braswell, "FBI Joins Shooting Scrutiny," *Hattiesburg American*, July 1, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, "Shooting Sparks Councilman's Proposal," *Hattiesburg American*, July 7, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, "Panel to Study Police Violence," *Hattiesburg American*, July 8, 1987.

fast that he knocked Barnes out of the way, and he tackled Officer Reid to the ground, landing on top of him on the far end of the porch. Davis jumped on Wheeler's legs, and Barnes knelt on Wheeler's back. Barnes pinned one of Wheeler's arms to his back and handcuffed it. But Wheeler used his free arm to grab Reid's service revolver. He started shooting. One bullet grazed Reid's forehead, another hit the porch beneath Reid's legs. Before Barnes could grab the gun, Wheeler aimed at Sherrill as she rushed toward the porch to help. He shot. She clutched her chest and fell into a flower bed. Seconds later, Barnes wrestled the gun from Wheeler, and the officers restrained and handcuffed him.²⁰

Captain Charlie Sherrill was the first backup officer to arrive on the scene. He rushed to his dying wife, raised her head, and cried out in anguish. Reporters flocked to the hospital in hope of some word that the beloved female detective had survived. Their hopes collapsed as they saw the officers' faces broken with grief. Detective Sherrill, a 33-year-old mother of two young children, was dead. Hattiesburg erupted in sorrow and fury. On the force since 1974, Sherrill was the first female officer hired by the HPD and the only female officer ever to hold the rank of detective. In the wake of the Westside rapes, she established the Hattiesburg Rape Crisis Center, and she headed the rape and juvenile case division. She stressed the importance of treating rape victims with sensitivity and changed the department's approach to sex crimes. She had plans to attend law school that fall and start a new phase in her career. Over a thousand people attended

²⁰ *Noah Wheeler v. State of Mississippi*, case no. DP-80, Supreme Court of Mississippi, 536 So. 2d 1341; 1988 Miss. LEXIS 605, December 14, 1988, Decided, [hereinafter cited as *Wheeler v. Mississippi* (1988)]; Nathan Johnson, "Policewoman Killed in Line of Duty," *Hattiesburg American*, January 1, 1985; William Willbanks, *True Heroines: Police Women Killed in the Line of Duty Throughout the United States, 1916-1999* (Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 2000), 79; Nathan Johnson, "Policewoman Killed in Line of Duty," *Hattiesburg American*, January 1, 1985.

her funeral. Law enforcement officers from Laurel took over city policing so all Hattiesburg officers could pay their respects. The mourners stood in the drizzling rain as policemen lowered her coffin and laid her to rest. The honor guard saluted the fallen female detective as seven riflemen fired into the air. Grief overtook Charlie Sherrill as he accepted the American flag and Sergeant Larry Moore gave him his wife's badge. The officers in the HPD fought back tears as the bugle players sounded their grief with "Taps."²¹

District Attorney Glen White announced that he would seek the death penalty for Wheeler. No lawyer in Hattiesburg wanted the case. Public defender Jeff Stewart represented him at his arraignment, but he refused to represent him in trial because Sherrill had been his close friend. Eventually, Wheeler retained an attorney from Fayette, a small town 140 miles northwest of Hattiesburg. The trial, moved 92 miles north to Brandon in April 1986, took less than a week. On the stand, Wheeler testified that the gun discharged accidentally, and he had no intention of killing anyone. After a 90-minute deliberation, the jurors found Wheeler guilty. Judge Richard McKenzie sentenced Wheeler to death. At the time of Saucier's homicide, Wheeler was appealing his conviction. Over a year later, in December 1988, the Mississippi Supreme Court, with

²¹ Willbanks, *True Heroine*, 80-81; Nathan Johnson, "Policewoman Killed in Line of Duty," *Hattiesburg American*, January 1, 1985; James O. Saxton and Betty Mallett, "Community Lovingly Remembers Sherrill," *Hattiesburg American*, January 1, 1985; Nathan Johnson and Betty Mallett, "Fallen Policewoman Saluted," *Hattiesburg American*, January 3, 1985.

one justice dissenting, reduced Wheeler's sentence to life on the grounds that Wheeler did not know that Sherrill was a police officer because she was dressed in plainclothes.²²

The murder of Jackie Sherrill devastated the HPD, and it taught officers that if they wished to protect their lives and that of their fellow officers, they must act quickly and with greater aggression in situations involving hostile suspects. Thus, many of them perceived the shooting of Saucier as an unfortunate necessity. Years after Officers Landers and Sims retired, they explained that the line between justifiable and excessive force was thin, and officers were not robots who could ensure the correct measure of force. Moreover, that line could become blurred when the suspect resisted arrest because, as Sims remarked, the officers knew that if they hesitated for a second the suspect could kill them. The suspect might have a weapon, and if he had a criminal record he might willingly harm the officer to escape because he feared returning to prison. Landers concluded, "sometimes the will to survive, . . . to go home to your family, the adrenaline that's in your system, the fear that this may be your last day, all that leads you to use . . . more force than is necessary." Both men were on the force when Wheeler murdered Detective Sherrill.²³ Sherrill's death broke the heart of the HPD as much as Saucier's death horrified the black community, and it informed their conflicting perspectives.

Black Councilmen Charles Lawrence and Eddie Holloway perceived the lack of an interracial dialogue between the HPD and the black community as the crux of the divide. They devised a biracial solution to the problem when they proposed developing

²² James O. Saxton, "White to Seek Death Penalty for Wheeler," *Hattiesburg American*, January 2, 1985; Betty Mallett, "Alleged Killer Looking for Lawyer," *Hattiesburg American*, January 3, 1985; *Wheeler v. Mississippi* (1988); Willbanks, *True Heroines*, 80.

²³ Quoting Wayne Landers, interview. Charlie Sims, interview.

an external review panel that would not only investigate charges of police misconduct but hold town forums to reconcile the breach between law enforcement and the black community. Holloway held Chief Oubre in high esteem, and he found some of the complaints leveled by the NAACP unwarranted. Furthermore, Holloway considered black-on-black crime a greater threat to the black community. He tried to show the council that the panel's public investigations would prevent the HPD from obscuring facts to protect its officers while also revealing that some complaints were fabricated. Moreover, it would provide officers with a forum to explain to the black community that it benefited citizens to work with police to eradicate crime in their neighborhoods. The relationships sure to result from the experience would encourage blacks to perceive officers as their protectors, and it would diminish incidents of police misconduct as officers were less likely to abuse persons they knew. Some whites supported the proposal. Constable Billy McGee stressed that the panel would possess the objectivity that chiefs lacked. Officer Sims disagreed; he argued that because a panel of civilians would lack officer training, they could not determine the difference between justifiable and excessive force. The HPD, Mayor Morgan, and the white council members blocked the proposal. According to Holloway, whites opposed the concept because they feared that blacks would fill the panel with "radicals from the neighborhood." Holloway also confronted resistance from blacks who labeled him an Uncle Tom when he refused to support their aggressive crusade against police.²⁴

²⁴ Quoting Eddie Holloway, interview. Charlie Sims, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Janet Braswell, "Can Cops Police Selves?" *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 1993; Nikki Davis Maute, "2 Councilmen Dislike Police Probe," *Hattiesburg American*, February 6, 1990; Nikki Davis Maute, "Shooting Sparks Councilman's Proposal," *Hattiesburg American*, July 7, 1987; Janet Braswell, "NAACP

At the least, the turmoil inspired the HPD to implement community policing programs. Ideally, community policing facilitates “collaborative partnerships” between the community and police officers to identify and develop solutions to public safety issues. Consequently, the police and lawful citizens perceive each other as “allies” in the struggle to improve or preserve the security and health of the community. Chief Oubre implemented community policing policies in the HPD by dividing each district into smaller sections, ordering his officers to acquaint themselves with the citizens in their beat, and directing them to act as “public servants” with responsibilities beyond arresting criminals. If officers helped citizens acquire social and city services, the citizens would perceive them as guardians whom they could trust. In return, the citizens might provide officers with the information they needed to locate suspects, drug houses, and disrupt gang activity. Under Chief Oubre, community policing remained in an embryonic stage, but the HPD had begun making an effort toward change.²⁵

County law enforcement underwent a more significant transformation in 1992 when Billy McGee ran for sheriff. McGee sought the white and black vote in a door-to-door campaign, requested the support of black leaders, and advertised his candidacy in Fred Burns’ newspaper, *The Informer*. McGee defeated the seven other candidates in a

Criticizes City Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1990, all in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM.

²⁵ First quote, COPS, Office of Community Oriented Policing, “Community Policing Defined” US Department of Justice, <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/default.asp?item=36> ; second quote, Community Police Consortium, *Understanding Community Policing—A Framework for Action*, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994, vii; third quote, Billy McGee, interview. Wayne Landers, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Nikki Davis Maute, “Hattiesburg Police Behind New Policy,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 20, 1991, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM.

landslide. Upon taking office, McGee hired African American Constable Charles Bolton as Assistant Chief of the Sheriff's Department and Chief of the Forrest County Jail. From the moment he took office, McGee instigated an important transformation of county law enforcement when he informed his deputies and guards that he would not tolerate verbal or physical abuse of suspects or prisoners. He stressed that people experienced an unnerving sense of losing control while under custody or while officers tried to arrest them. Consequently, many of them responded with verbal retaliation; some tried to escape; others assaulted officers. If guards and officers lacked the temperament to withstand verbal insults without retaliation, or physical assaults or attempted escapes without using excessive force, then they needed to find a new profession. When Rod Woullard and Burns contacted McGee about alleged misconduct in the county jail, he allowed them to interview prisoners who complained of brutality, and he provided them with open access to employees and reports. They found the complaints unwarranted, and they developed a trusting relationship with McGee.²⁶

Black activists hoped that Chief of Police Wayne Landers, who took charge of the HPD in late August 1993, would prove as receptive to their concerns. Mayor Morgan won reelection that June in a hard fought campaign against Bobby Chain that focused on the rising crime in Hattiesburg. He hoped that his new chief would curtail the trend while also improving community policing methods. Landers, a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), had entered the force in the mid-1970s and climbed the ranks for nearly two decades. A native of Holt, Alabama, he was the first chief of the HPD not born and raised in Hattiesburg. An affable, deeply religious family man,

²⁶ Billy McGee, interview; Rod Woullard, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interview, May 12, 2009.

Landers was well-liked by most citizens of Hattiesburg, including Reverend Fairley, who described Landers as a “Christian-hearted person.” Landers’ critics and his defenders agreed that he faced some of the most challenging racial struggles in the HPD’s recent history, but they disagreed on the effectiveness of his response. Less than a year after Landers assumed control over the HPD, gang violence exploded across Hattiesburg.²⁷

In the spring of 1994, 20-year-old Darren Williams, the charismatic member of the Black Gangster Disciples, a division of the Crips nation, claimed that his gang was about “peace and understanding.” Then, someone shot him in the heart when he exited S&B Lounge on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. At his wake, blacks clad in blue came in droves to Reverend Fairley’s funeral home. Nervous employees wore bullet proof vests, police circled the area, and terror lay just beneath the surface as eyes scanned the mourners for the red symbols worn by the enemy gang—the Bloods. At the cemetery, gang members lowered Williams’ coffin into the earth and then circled his final resting place in a ritual mourning, each saluting their fallen comrade. Four hundred people, mostly distraught youths, attended the funeral. Several drive-by shootings soon followed Williams’ April 16th murder.²⁸

²⁷ Janet Braswell, “Landers Will Head Hub Police,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 26, 1993, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File; Geoff Pender, “Morgan Promises Progress,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 9, 1993; “Hattiesburg Candidates at a Glance,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 1993. Geoff Pender, “Crime: A Hot Topic In Hub,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 23, 1993; Fred Burns, interview May 12, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8, 13, 2009; Billy McGee, interview.

²⁸ Quoting Janet Braswell, “Brotherhood or Criminal Band?” *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994. Janet Braswell, “Tension Shrouds Williams’ Funeral,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 23, 1994; “Violence Can Hit Anywhere,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; Our View, “City Must Face Gang Problem,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; “USM Student Sees Deadly Effect of Violence,” *Hattiesburg*

In the wake of the violence, city leaders held town meetings attended by hundreds of residents. The elderly complained that the police were not aggressive enough. One woman requested that the city clear out overgrown vacant lots to prevent criminals from hiding in the brush. Some people recommended that authorities institute harsher penalties for absent fathers. Others requested the development of mentoring programs and activities to keep kids away from drugs and gangs and better services to rehabilitate troubled teenagers. When an ex-gang member pointed out that many ex-convicts returned to crime because felony records prevented them from acquiring decent jobs, several citizens suggested that the city inaugurate work programs for ex-convicts.²⁹

Although the city failed to enact a massive social program to address the problem with drugs and gangs, Chief Landers implemented several significant changes to transform the HPD into a community policing force. He acquired pay raises to attract educated recruits, and he instituted an employee drug testing program to weed out corrupt officers. In hopes of improving race relations, Landers developed mandatory human diversity training for all police, reinstated affirmative action policies, and he advanced Oubre's community policing methods by creating the Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) that he stationed in high-crime areas. The NET officers became well-acquainted with residents, helped them acquire public services, and served as mentors to the youth,

American, April 24, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Area Residents: Gang Violence Constant Threat," *Hattiesburg American*, April 29, 1994.

²⁹ Janet Braswell, "Meeting Puts Eye on Crime," *Hattiesburg American*, April 29, 1994. Janet Braswell, "Violence Can Hit Anywhere," *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Residents Fear for Life," *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Residents Want More Police on Streets," *Hattiesburg American*, April 27, 1994; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Wayne Landers, interview; Billy McGee, interview; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009.

all the while acquiring intelligence on drug and gang activity. Landers tried to show his officers that most residents of the inner city were law-abiding citizens who wanted protection but feared police. Landers also tried to change the officers' approach to criminals by hiring a professor from Harvard, George J. Thompson, to teach him and his officers "verbal judo," a law enforcement technique that uses the "the art of persuasion" to convince suspects to comply with orders peacefully. Finally, Landers tried to foster biracial dialogue by hosting community forums. During one forum, he explained to attendees that to stem crime, he had instructed officers to question people loitering on known drug corners. These incidents, Landers insisted, only led to physical confrontations when suspects resisted or ran, as both responses placed officers in danger. Fairley tried to explain that blacks often ran because rampant brutality made them fear all officers. Both the police and the HPD fought over the response to the symptom rather than the root of the problem—the economic shifts, past and present racial discrimination, political exclusion of blacks, and the War on Drugs all of which created and perpetuated the black *undercaste*. Until the city and the nation radically restructured the sociopolitical and economic systems, the cycle of the black *undercaste* would persist. In the meantime, law enforcement could only triage a perpetual wound.³⁰

³⁰ Quoting Wayne Landers, interview; George J. Thompson, Verbal Judo Training Course, Verbal Judo Institute Inc., World Headquarters, website: <http://www.verbaljudo.com/> (accessed September 2009); "Gang Activity in Hattiesburg," *Hattiesburg American*, October 22, 2006. Janet Braswell, "Police Chief Landers Stays Upbeat," *Hattiesburg American*, October 9, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Area Police Stops Questioned," *Hattiesburg American*, December 6, 1995; Thad Slaton, "Residents Say Police Out of Line," *Hattiesburg American*, March 14, 1995, all in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM. Kenneth Fairley, interviews May 8 and 13, 2009; Charlie Sims, interview. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 220-221.

Many blacks accused the HPD of creating or at least exacerbating the wounds of the black *undercaste*; and many blacks distrusted the HPD because they knew of incidents in which poor intelligence led officers to target law-abiding citizens, and in the aftermath of such mistakes, they reacted with indifference to the harm they caused. Elpet Robinson, an amputee confined to a wheelchair, suffered a frightening experience in January 1995 when officers broke down his door without warning in the middle of the night and held him at gunpoint. They yanked his wife and children from their beds, dragged them into the living room, and handcuffed them all while they ransacked their home for drugs. When the officers realized that they had raided the wrong house, they departed without apologies. Police left behind a large hole in the Robinsons' living room wall and a crack in the door. Neighbors expressed shock over the incident, for everyone in the community knew that the Robinsons had tried to drive drug dealers off their streets. Officer Sims defended the no-warning entry and stressed that the Supreme Court allowed surprise police home entries when officers believed residents might harm them or destroy evidence. Sims' explanation failed to mitigate the rage in the black community. The HPD lost an opportunity to use community policing to respond to their mistake. The Robinsons wanted to eradicate drugs in their community and could have become great allies of the HPD if in the aftermath the officers had treated them with respect and solicited their aid.³¹

Although over the next several years Landers made improvements as he tried to balance demands by some blacks to confront crime aggressively with demands by others to proceed more cautiously toward suspects, problems persisted. First, some profiling

³¹ Janet Braswell, "Police Drug Raid Upsets Area Family," February 2, 1996, "Hattiesburg Police," Mississippiana Vertical File, USM.

methods led to harassment of African Americans. Second, a Rambo complex among some officers led to the use of excessive force. Third, the fraternity mentality inhibited internal investigations. Fourth, because Landers, like all his predecessors, rose to chief through the ranks of the department, he cultivated familial ties with his fellow officers, rendering it difficult for him to judge his officers objectively. Finally, Landers, like the chiefs before him, prevented outside interference in investigations of alleged police misconduct. Thus, few blacks trusted his findings when he ruled all the NAACP complaints unwarranted. Although Landers tried to remove subjectivity from investigations when he suggested purchasing cameras for his fleet to film police interactions during arrests, the city lacked the funds to purchase cameras for all of his vehicles. Subjective investigations persisted. As Sheriff McGee stressed, Landers tried to be fair, but he placed too much faith in his officers.³²

Blacks were also suspicious of the courts because judges tended to favor the officer over the accuser as reflected in the case of Edward Fairley, an African American, and Don Jeffries, a white officer. During the early 1990s, Edward Fairley, an habitual criminal, accused Officer Jeffries of beating him with his flashlight while arresting him on robbery charges. Before the case reached trial, Jeffries was lauded as a hero in the city because he risked his life during a nightclub shooting spree by rushing the gunman and disarming him. In 1994 the judge dismissed Fairley's lawsuit because he considered Fairley's injury the result of justifiable force. Soon afterward, Jeffries, who suffered from marital and financial problems, tried to rob a bank. The strange path of Officer Jeffries

³² Billy McGee, interview; Wayne Landers, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interviews May 12 and June 10, 2009; Janet Braswell, "Views Vary," *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 1993, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM.

called into question his credibility in the Fairley case. It also opened the department to further suspicion.³³

Black leaders were not without fault in these conflicts. Landers may have trusted his officers too much, but black leaders often trusted complainants too much. For example, in 1989 Fairley used NAACP funds to hire a lawyer for Antonio Battee, a 17-year-old African American accused of armed robbery and the rape of a middle-aged white woman. District Attorney Glen White had significant evidence against Battee, including a confession, fibers, and fingerprints. At first, Battee agreed to plead guilty, and he accepted a 20-year sentence. But then he retracted his plea, and he later claimed that police coerced his confession. During the trial, Battee admitted to robbing the woman's home, but he denied raping her. An all-white jury found Battee guilty and sentenced him to life in prison. Battee's attorneys, with the support of Fairley, appealed the conviction because prosecutors had denied Battee his right to a jury of his peers by seating an all-white jury. Although it appears that Battee, who lost his appeal, was guilty, Glen White had ensured the selection of all-white juries in the Battee case as he had in similar interracial rape case. For decades, blacks accused police of coercing confessions through brutality. However, because the prosecutors had a wealth of evidence in the Battee case, and the defense had no evidence of police brutality, the decision by Fairley to turn it into an NAACP case damaged his ability to portray himself and the Forrest County NAACP as guardians of racial justice. During the battles over police brutality that followed,

³³ Billy McGee, interview. Janet Braswell, "Lawsuits Claims Police Brutality by Don Jeffries," *Hattiesburg American*, March 16, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Judge Throws Out Inmate's Brutality Suit," *Hattiesburg American*, April 13, 1994; Janet Braswell, "Good Cop...Bad Cop," *Hattiesburg American*, July 31, 1994, all in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM. Janet Braswell, "Inmate Testifies," *Hattiesburg American*, March 30, 1994.

several NAACP members began to distance themselves from Fairley as they preferred a more moderate approach. After several internecine conflicts, Fairley resigned his presidency. In the meantime, Fred Burns and Rod Woullard founded a Hattiesburg chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to sustain an aggressive campaign against the HPD.³⁴

Like Fairley, Woullard and Burns took an aggressive approach to combat racial issues. Just as white leaders had inhibited the development of respectful dialogue between officers and the black community by rejecting Holloway's proposal for a citizens' panel, SCLC leaders hampered such efforts when they hosted hearings on complaints and refused to allow police to present their perceptions of the incidents. In the summer of 1995, Burns and Woullard led an SCLC sponsored Community Commission Human Rights investigation of police brutality. Many blacks supported the investigation, and they demanded that their councilmen take a harder line against police. Several blacks had recently accused Holloway of becoming an Uncle Tom because of his refusal to

³⁴ *State of Mississippi v. Antonio Battee* (1988), case no. 12961, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 8, 414, [hereinafter all Batee's cases cited as *Mississippi v. Battee*]; *Mississippi v. Battee* (1989), case no. 13566, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 8, 616; *Mississippi v. Battee* (1989) case no. 13566, Antonio Battee case file, all in Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. *Antonio Battee v. State of Mississippi* (1993), case no. 90-KA-0618, Mississippi State Supreme Court, Jackson, case file; Antonio Battee, inmate status, Mississippi Department of Corrections, MDOC #74139, Parchman, Mississippi; Kelly Carson, "Battee, 18, Indicted Once More," *Hattiesburg American*, March 11, 1989; Janet Braswell, "Battee Rape Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, August 14, 1989; Kelly Carson, "Battee Stops Rape Trial," *Hattiesburg American*, August 16, 1989; Kelly Carson, "Battee Says Rape Confession Forced," *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 1989; Kelly Carson, "Battee Trial Goes to Jury Today," *Hattiesburg American*, August 18, 1989; Kelly Carson, "Battee Must Serve 42 years on Robbery, Rape," *Hattiesburg American*, August 19, 1989; "When All Else Fails, Cry Racism," *Hattiesburg American*, August 25, 1987; Nikki Davis Maute, "NAACP Protests Battee Sentence," *Hattiesburg American*, August 21, 1989; Fairley interviews. Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009.

attack the HPD. It infuriated Holloway, but he realized the negative political realities of disparaging the crusade against the police. On the morning of August 30, before the commission held its public hearing on its findings, Holloway contacted Landers and warned him that he planned to criticize him at the hearing for political reasons and that he hoped Landers understood that he did not mean what he decided he had to say. That night, after a dozen black witnesses testified that police had mistreated them, Councilman Holloway shocked everyone when he lambasted the HPD and compared Chief Landers to Bull Connor, the Police Chief in Birmingham who became notorious during the Movement for ordering the release of attack dogs on protestors and the use of fire hose assaults on children. The diatribe was out of character for Holloway as he usually approached conflicts with objectivity, and he admired the chief. The commission refused to allow Landers or his officers to counter the attack.³⁵

By the mid-1990s, some racist officers still served on the HPD, but Landers was not one of them. Rather, he was among a generation of progressive officers that moved the HPD away from its racist roots. As a result, racism had diminished in the HPD. Some citizens even argued that police misconduct was race neutral. The HPD received some complaints by blacks and whites against black officers, and some whites also filed complaints against white officers. Their criticisms received less publicity. Still, race as a factor in the battles between the HPD and the black citizenry had not vanished, but rather changed. Institutional prejudice endured even as private racism diminished. Racism, race and class segregation, and economic shifts had created the inner cities that produced

³⁵ Wayne Landers, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Rod Wollard, interview; Kelly Carson, "Police Chief Disputes Commission's Determination on Alleged Brutality," *Hattiesburg American*, August 31, 1995, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM.

gangs and crime. The city leaders neglected to fully address black grievances even after the inclusion of blacks on the city council which led to cyclical poverty and crime in traditional black neighborhoods. The HPD like departments across the nation had centered its War on Drugs in the inner cities as federal training programs taught them to believe blacks abused drugs at a higher rate than their white counterparts. Certainly, as Landers and Sims noted, drug crimes were being committed in the black inner city, but as many blacks argued, they were also being committed in white communities. Moreover, police crackdowns had resulted in mistreatment of innocents and criminals alike and taught many poor blacks to perceive police and judicial authorities as their enemies rather than their protectors. African Americans' distrust of white authority was deeply rooted in their Jim Crow history and exacerbated by their minority status in the governing bodies that controlled the city. Whites retained the majority control over Hattiesburg's most powerful institutions including the mayor's office, the city council, the public service department, and the HPD; and blacks tended to perceive these institutions as using their power to further white interests and protect whites at the expense of blacks. Many blacks also insisted that police continued to abuse black citizens. Consequently, Fairley and his inner circle determined that blacks would never obtain equal justice until blacks controlled the city.³⁶

³⁶ For complaints about black officers as well as intraracial complaints, see Billy McGee, interview; Nikki Davis Maute, "Palmer's Group Questions," *Hattiesburg American*, March 23, 1993; *Donna McGregor and John C. McGregor v. Steve Reid, City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Police Department, City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, a municipality, et al.*, Case No. 2:94-cv-00306-CWP, September 9, 1994, *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, case file, clerk's office, William Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Complaint and Separate Answer of the Defendant *McGregor v. Reid* (1994), United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi, Hattiesburg Division, Transfer no. 021990409,

During the mid-1990s, Fairley summoned many of the old CIAFC leaders to his church and requested that they select a black man to run for mayor. The men considered Johnny DuPree the best candidate because though he agreed with their goals, unlike them, he had not served on the “frontlines” of the Second Movement and lacked the enemies that they had acquired. DuPree had solid experience in governing. He had served as president of the school board for three of his four year term, and in 1992 he was elected to the county board of supervisors. During the 1990s, he had also received a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in political science from USM. A deeply religious man with an amicable personality, he appealed to whites and blacks alike. As a child of Jim Crow born to a single maid and raised with his two siblings in a double barrel shotgun house, he was intimately familiar with the twin sufferings of poverty and

Box no. 26, Location no. G0154155SAN, Civil Cases, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, Georgia; *Joseph Richardson and Danny Richardson v. The City of Hattiesburg, Chief Keith Oubre, Patrolmen Sam Croone and Scott Morgan* (1988), case no. H88-0207(W), *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, case file, clerk’s office, William Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; For different views of policing and race in Hattiesburg, see Wayne Landers, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; Fred Burns, interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009. For analysis of the struggles between black communities and police across the nation and various arguments as to the causes and perpetuation of black suffering in the inner cities, see, Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 97, 101, 103; Randall Kennedy, *Race, Crime, and the Law* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); *Police Brutality: An Anthology*, ed. Jill Nelson (New York: W. W. & Norton, 2000); Michael Eric Dyson, “Black Youth, Pop Culture, and the Politics of Nostalgia,” *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Michael B. Katz, *The Underclass Debate* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, reprinted 1981); For white privilege, see, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical White Studies*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

racism. His family never owned a vehicle, a home, or a television; and their rented house lacked indoor plumbing. DuPree began working at age 8 as a newspaper delivery boy because he accidentally broke his sister's glasses, and his mother could not afford to replace them. DuPree promised that if elected, he would fight poverty and racial injustice.³⁷

Three other people ran for mayor in 1997, including incumbent Mayor Morgan, former mayor Bobby Chain, and independent Shawn O'Hara, but the race centered on DuPree and Morgan. DuPree only raised \$8,000 for his campaign compared to Morgan's \$100,000, but he had a powerful "Bridging the Gap," motto and a "Ten-point Community Development" program to close the abyss between rich and poor, black and white, and the police and the community in part by improving infrastructure, education, and job training programs in impoverished neighborhoods. DuPree considered rising crime and the hostile relationship between police and the black community the most pressing problem, and he pledged to rectify it by building a diverse department, advancing community policing, consolidating child service agencies and programs, and creating more recreational outlets in black communities. Although Morgan won the four-man race with 47.7 percent of the vote, DuPree came in a close second, and he and his inner circle determined that by 2001, the racial demography of the city would shift enough that the black vote could tip the election in their favor.³⁸ A few months later, a confrontation

³⁷ Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; Fairley interviews. For DuPree's experience, see, DuPree, interview; Scott M. Larson, "Candidates Would Resign Posts," *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 2001, Hattiesburg Elections Vertical File, McCain, USM.

³⁸ First quote, Janet Braswell, "Candidates Talk Quality of Life," *Hattiesburg American*, May 30, 1997; second quote, "Mayoral Candidate DuPree Circulates

between Fairley and police bolstered their determination to win in 2001.

On a quiet September day in 1997, Ellis Alford, an ailing black minister, pointed his shotgun at the black and white emergency responders who entered his bedroom. He had not asked his caregiver to call the ambulance, and he refused to return to the hospital. The white responder fled the house and ran into the street as he shouted into his radio that the minister had a gun. Soon, dozens of police, the SWAT team, and Assistant Chief Sims converged on the scene. The commotion brought neighbors into the street. One of them called Fairley and begged him to come quickly before they killed Alford. The call quickened Fairley's step more than usual. Alford had become a second father and a mentor to Fairley, and he feared that police might shoot him as they had shot Perry Saucier in a hostage situation 10 years earlier.³⁹

By the time Fairley arrived on the scene, the police had formed a perimeter around Alford's home. Snipers stationed on rooftops pointed their rifles at the windows. SWAT teams waited for orders to storm the house from Assistant Chief Sims, who directed the situation from Alford's carport. As Fairley climbed out of his vehicle, Alford's neighbors surrounded him and implored him to stop the police. Fairley rushed toward Sims and demanded to know the status of the situation. At that moment, the black

Platform," *The Advertiser News*, May 14, 1997, Hattiesburg Elections Vertical File, McCain USM. Janet Braswell, "Crime Remains Top Campaign Issue in Mayoral Election," *Hattiesburg American*, May 28, 1997; Janet Braswell, "Mayoral Election Foes Chart Courses," *Hattiesburg American*, May 8, 1997; Janet Braswell, "Morgan Rolls To Easy Win," *Hattiesburg American*, June 4, 1997; Janet Braswell, "Mayoral Losers Have No Regrets About Race," *Hattiesburg American*, June 4, 1997; Johnny DuPree, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews May 8 and 13, 2009; Fred Burns interviews May 12 and June 10, 2009.

³⁹ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Monica P. Carter, "Hostage Crisis Leads to Arrest of Local Pastor," *Hattiesburg American*, September 27, 1997.

attendant strode out of the house and announced that Alford had put down his gun. According to Fairley, however, Sims ordered his men to remain in their positions. Fairley pleaded with Sims, “He’s like a father to me, man. . . . You want him out, I’ll bring him out.” When Sims failed to respond, Fairley strode toward the house, but Sims blocked his path, smacked his hands against Fairley’s chest, and ordered him to retreat. Fairley retorted, “Would you please remove your hand off my chest?” Sims repeated his warning, and Fairley again demanded he let him pass. On Sims’ order, officers surrounded Fairley, threw him to the ground, handcuffed him, and tossed him in the back of the police vehicle.⁴⁰

Sims remembered the confrontation differently. He recalled that when Fairley demanded to see his parishioner, Sims responded, “not a problem, Reverend, as soon as we’re finished. We just have to secure the scene, make sure everything is safe.” Fairley refused to wait and tried to rush the house. Sims claimed that he blocked Fairley’s path, and Fairley ran into his hand. Sims repeated his command for Fairley to wait until police secured the scene. Fairley demanded: “Get your hands off me.” Again Sims repeated his command, but Fairley only scowled and tried again to pass by him. Sims said, “you are under arrest for disorderly conduct and refusing to obey a lawful command of a law enforcement officer, put your hands behind your back.”⁴¹

Sims considered Fairley a scourge on the police department and a shyster. He alleged that the reverend falsely accused officers of brutality to acquire power in the community and bask in the publicity that erupted. Although Sims expressed some

⁴⁰ Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

⁴¹ Charlie Sims, interview.

sympathy for Fairley as he knew that the reverend had suffered under the Jim Crow system, he insisted that Fairley must realize that the community had transformed. Sims had also grown frustrated that every conflict in the city turned into a racial dispute, and he refused to retreat from confrontations when he believed his side correct just because someone might falsely label him a racist. To Fairley, Officer Sims represented the white southern male ego he had fought against all of his life. As a teenager desegregating all-white schools in a southern world controlled by white males, he had no choice but to quell the innate instinct to physically fight back when he suffered beatings at the hands of white coaches and white kids. The experience left an indelible imprint on him. As a man, he reclaimed his masculinity by confronting white authority. Fairley's campaign against the HPD became a catharsis for him. His forceful assault against one of the most powerful symbols of white male aggression and southern oppression purged the emasculations of his boyhood. The arrest under Sims drew Fairley back into that bleak powerlessness. As police placed Fairley in the backseat of the police vehicle, neighbors rushed forward and slammed their fists against the windows. Their anger moved him. They were still fighting, and he would too.⁴²

After his release from jail, Fairley arranged a meeting with Chief Landers and Mayor Morgan to demand that they ensure that officers act with greater sensitivity toward citizens. He also held a press conference at Mount Carmel Baptist Church at which ambulance attendant James Armstrong called the HPD's actions reckless, and he insisted that Alford had never held him hostage. The public responded with fury. In a letter to the *Hattiesburg America*, one citizen, Ann Rowells, scolded Fairley like a child

⁴² Charlie Sims, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009.

when she declared that Chief Sims “should have gotten a switch and tanned your behind like a 10-year-old brat!” The editors of the newspaper called it “strange” that Armstrong would criticize police who tried to rescue him. They also castigated Fairley and insisted that “no one has the right to trample upon police procedure and override the authority of law enforcement. No one . . . Not even a pastor sporting good intentions is above the law.” Fred Burns rushed to Fairley’s defense and lauded the reverend for trying to help his parishioner whose life he considered in jeopardy. In a turn of the editors’ phrases, Burns asserted that “not even a newspaper sporting good intentions is above the truth. The truth is never strange, but always relevant.”⁴³

To Fairley’s great dismay, when Chief Landers retired in February 1998, Mayor Morgan appointed Sims chief, and the city council unanimously confirmed him. Certainly, 39-year-old Sims had the experience to lead the HPD. A graduate of the USM and the FBI National Training Academy, he had joined the HPD in 1981, and since that time he had climbed the ranks from patrolman to assistant chief. Sims had helped Chief Landers develop many of the community policing programs including NET. HPD officers described Sims as highly qualified, knowledgeable, and just. Some blacks endorsed Sims, including Raylawni Branch, a longtime NAACP activist. Others like Deborah Denard, a victim advocate, considered Sims a pleasant person, but she alleged that he failed to discipline officers who broke the rules, and he ignored affirmative action

⁴³ First quote, Ann Rowells, “Fairley Owes Residents, City, Police Department an Apology,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 1, 1997; second and third, quotes, “Above the Law?” *Hattiesburg American*, September 30, 1997; last quote, Fred Burns, “Rev. Fairley Deserves Praise, Not Criticism,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 7, 1997. Nita McCann, “Chief Says Police Acted Properly,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 30, 1987; Nekeidra P. Allen, “EMT Worker Denies He Was Held Hostage,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 28, 1997; “Mayor, Chief, and Fairley Talk Police,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 1, 1997.

decrees. Sims' confirmation inspired Fairley, Burns, and Woullard to launch immediately DuPree's 2001 mayoral campaign. They spent three years convincing African Americans that the only way to "to empower the black community" was for blacks to control the executive office and the HPD.⁴⁴

In Laurel, the struggle for black dominance over the political arena began even earlier. In 1990, to redeem their towns from white supremacist rule—as they perceived their governing bodies—African American Councilmen George Gaddy and James Jones orchestrated a 10-year plan for a black political takeover of municipal power. With the backing of the Department of Justice, Gaddy and Jones used the 1990 census to redistrict Laurel in a manner that favored the development of more black wards. Jones realized that the shift in industry from the Masonite factory and oil companies to poultry companies would eventually lead to a majority black population in the city because the poultry industry attracted black migrants to work in the plants. As whites responded to black migration with white flight, blacks moved into once all-white neighborhoods. Jones and Gaddy mapped the new district lines so that within the decade white flight and black migration would create five majority-black districts. Jones also worked with the Department of Justice to create a black-majority state legislative district by combining Jasper, Jones, and Clark counties. In 1993 the district elected Omeria Scott, an African American from Laurel, to the Mississippi legislature.⁴⁵ On the municipal level, the shift

⁴⁴ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Carlton Wade, "Officers Welcome Sims as New Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 1998; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Janet Braswell, "Sims Takes Lead of City Police Force," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 1998; Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Johnny DuPree, interview; Fred Burns interviews, May 12 and June 10, 2009.

would take nearly a decade.

The shift toward racial progressive governing, however, began sooner when Susan Boone Vincent, an attractive, middle-aged white woman, sent shock waves through “the good old boys club” by announcing her Democratic candidacy for the 1993 mayoral race. Bobby Nichols was the leading Republican candidate against Councilman Joe Norman, and Laurelites expected a close Democratic primary between incumbent Mayor Henry Bucklew and challenger Don Bullock. When Vincent entered the race, she confronted a wall of white men who wielded their considerable power to block her admission into the political arena that in their minds should be the domain of men, preferably white men. Joe Sanderson, the wealthy owner of the lucrative Sanderson Farms chicken plant, directed Vincent to leave the race and warned her that he had raised nearly \$100,000 for Nichols campaign, which he would use to crush her candidacy. Yet the unflappable Vincent determined to defeat the white boys club by fighting the prejudices still firmly rooted in Laurel.⁴⁶

At the onset of the 1990s, Laurel was as racially divided as ever, and many of the conflicts stemmed from black frustrations over persistent racial injustices. In 1992, the year before the mayoral race, President of the Jones County NAACP Manuel Jones led his 500-strong branch in a protest against discriminations in criminal sentencing and in

⁴⁵ Melinda Gholson, “Blacks Ask for Majority District,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 16, 1990, Laurel 1990 Vertical File, McCain, USM; James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008, MOHP recording; Terri, M, Smith, to Carolyn Payne, Council Members 1992 to Present, Office of the City Clerk, Laurel City Hall, Laurel, Mississippi.

⁴⁶ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview, by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009, MOHP recording. Maycie Gore, interview, June 10, 2009; Cora Wade-Seals, interview, May 5, 2009, both interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. Hal Marx, “Mayoral Debate to Air on Local TV Station,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 1, 1993.

the employment of public safety personnel. In the media, he lambasted the city for failing to hire and promote black police officers and firefighters on par with their white counterparts. Jones also criticized the county and city for its “dual justice system.” During an NAACP press conference on November 12, 1992, Jones denounced the courts for setting higher bail for accused blacks than whites. He substantiated his claims by noting that a judge had released a white man convicted of raping a woman in a church while he appealed his conviction but had denied bond to a black man accused of selling drugs. Soon afterward, Klansman J. Dale Jones called the NAACP leader, threatened him, and warned him to leave Laurel. With the help of the FBI, local law enforcement arrested Dale Jones, and the courts forced him to publicly apologize to the NAACP president. Manuel Jones considered Dale Jones’ punishment inadequate and reflective of the problems of persistent racial injustice.⁴⁷

During these protests for equal justice, the NAACP also struggled to address rising crime rates in black neighborhoods. At a meeting held in September 1992, Jones informed attendees that black-on-black violence had led to 18 murders that year. He implored African Americans to become more vigilant and to call police when they noticed suspicious behavior in their neighborhoods. Many blacks complained that when they called police, officers failed to respond, and on other occasions, they arrested the caller. Jones met with the newly appointed Police Chief Jamie Bush to inform him of these problems. Shocked, the chief assured him that he would not tolerate such discriminatory treatment toward African Americans by his officers. Afterward, Jones

⁴⁷ Quoting Dana Gower, “FBI Has Lead in NAACP Threat,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 25, 1992, NAACP Vertical File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as LRM]; Manuel Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, February 22, 2006, MOHP recording.

encouraged blacks to begin developing trusting relationships with the Laurel Police Department (LPD). In a town still fraught with racial divisiveness, however, reaching across racial lines to trust a predominantly white police department proved difficult.⁴⁸

Accusations of race-based police brutality by black citizens only increased that distrust as an incident in 1993 revealed. In the spring of 1993, three African Americans—Ambusy Lee Ramsey, his mother Savannah, and his friend Cleathus Ducksworth—accused several white policemen of beating them during a traffic stop. Officers claimed that the Ramseys and Ducksworth had initiated the violence and that they had simply used necessary force to defend themselves. The incident enraged many people in the black community as they considered it representative of a pattern of police brutality against blacks in Laurel. Manuel Jones and NAACP members packed council meetings to complain about the incident and to demand that the LPD resolve the problem by hiring more black officers. Chief Bush angered blacks when he found that the evidence in the internal investigation clearly exonerated his officers while the criminal investigation implicated the Ramseys and Ducksworth. The grand jury agreed with the police and indicted the accused on assault charges. The Ramseys and Ducksworth accepted a plea that reduced the charges to disorderly conduct punishable with a suspended jail sentence and a fine. Immediately afterward, they filed a lawsuit against the LPD in federal court. Judge Charles Pickering dismissed the case because the plaintiffs lacked evidence to prove their accusations. Many blacks disagreed with the ruling. In general, Laurel blacks considered accusations of police misconduct against the LPD justified, whereas most

⁴⁸ Dana Gower, “Man Sentenced for Threat,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 7, 1993; Dana Gower, “Business Owners Look For Solutions,” *Hattiesburg American*, September 19, 1992, NAACP Vertical File, LRM.

Laurel whites considered them unwarranted. Because the Ramsey/Duckworth case developed during the 1993 election season, it exacerbated the division over racial justice in the city and spurred many constituents to support candidates outside of city government. They hoped new leaders might foster peace, and blacks supported candidates who promised to unfetter Laurel from the shackles of racism.⁴⁹

Mayoral candidate Vincent represented that hope. She had not always been a racial progressive, but she embodied Laurel's racial metamorphosis and its possibility for transformation. Born to the Sixth Avenue elite in 1941, Vincent became part of the paternalistic class of moderate whites who supported segregation but disdained violence. Dr. Howard Boone and his high-society wife Billie raised Susan and her two sisters in a mansion in an era of great prosperity for white professionals. During her youth and young adult years, Susan never questioned her segregated society. As a child, Susan and her sisters grew close to their black maids, cooks, and nannies. They became particularly fond of their summer nanny, schoolteacher Gladys Austin. Dr. Boone developed a close professional relationship with Thomas Barnes, an African American doctor, and he helped him secure a position at the hospital. The Boones developed professional and even familial relationships with African Americans, but because the Boones, like most whites,

⁴⁹ Dana Gower, "Police Brutality Charged," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 15, 1993; Dana Gower, "Bush Denies Brutality Charge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 19, 1993; Jimmy Pippen, "Lawsuit Against Laurel Dismissed," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 17, 1996. *State of Mississippi v. Ambusy Ramsey* (1994), case nos. 8566 and 8569 and *State of Mississippi v. Cleathus Ducksworth* (1994), case no. 8567, both in *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 9, 368-369; Indictments Ramsey and Ducksworth case file; *Mississippi v. Savannah Ramsey, Ambusy Ramsey, Cleathus Ducksworth* (1994), case nos. 8565, 8566, 8567, 8569, case file, all at Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi; *Savannah Ramsey v. City of Laurel, et al.* (1994), case no. 2:94-cv-00168, *Docket: United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi*, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

were “true segregationists,” these relationships were always fragile and circumscribed by the racial hierarchy in the Deep South town.⁵⁰

Vincent came of age in changing times, and at first she refused to change with them. In 1962 she and her high school sweetheart, George Augustus Vincent, were students at the University of Mississippi when James Meredith desegregated the all-white institution. Like the majority of whites, they opposed Meredith’s efforts. They wore the popular button “Never” to convey that Ole Miss would never admit blacks. On the night before Meredith desegregated the university, George took Susan and her parents to the Ole Miss-Kentucky football game in Jackson where Governor Ross Barnett shouted to the roaring white crowd that he would never allow integration. Vincent and the Boones joined the jubilant spectators as they jumped to their feet, waved their Mississippi and Confederate flags, and sang, “Never, Never, Never, No-o-o Never, Never Never.” Decades later, Susan noted with regret that “it was kind of like a Nazi rally in that stadium that night.” The following day, under the protection of Chief Marshal J. P. McShane and the National Guard, Meredith enrolled. A mass riot followed that left two people dead. Still, Susan’s loyalties remained with the segregationists. Like most students, she had the coloring book that featured sketches of the riot with the caption: “this is Mr. Meredith, color him black; this is the riot, color it bloody; this is McShane, color him yellow.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Susan Vincent, interview.

⁵¹ First, third, and fourth, quotes, Susan Vincent, interview; second quote, Nadine Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Conscience at Ole Miss* (New York, The Free Press of Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997), 83. John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 139-140.

Susan began to reevaluate her racial philosophies when she became a victim of prejudice herself. After graduating from the University of Mississippi, she received a teaching job in Taylor, a rural town outside of Oxford, because a teacher had neglected to renew her teaching certificate. From the moment of her arrival, the xenophobic people treated her as an unlikable outsider, and despite her hard work, the administration refused to renew her contract. Not long after Susan and George wed, they moved to Jackson. George attended law school, and Susan received a job in Canton after a white teacher quit because two black children had desegregated the school. Susan Vincent's experience in Taylor led her to empathize with the children. Vincent's ambitious personality also led her to challenge gender prejudices, which in turn further advanced the evolution of her racial philosophies. After Vincent learned that she was pregnant, she became a homemaker for over a decade. Yet she could not quiet the stirring inside of her that longed to make a difference in a public life as well as in her private one. After many debates with her husband, she entered the political arena.⁵²

A fan of the progressive Democrat Ray Mabus, Vincent worked on his successful 1983 state auditor and 1987 gubernatorial campaigns and became a member of the Concerned Citizens for Better Government. When Mabus proposed holding a constitutional convention to replace the racist 1890 state constitution, Vincent was the only citizen to testify in favor of his proposal. The effort failed, in part because 15 African American legislators so feared that a constitutional convention would allow white conservatives to add covert forms of racist exclusion in a new constitution that they voted it down. Vincent also supported Mabus's efforts to revamp the Charity Hospital

⁵² Susan Vincent, interview.

system. When Vincent ran for state senator in 1991, Republican incumbent Vincent Scoper smeared her as a “Mabus’ puppet,” who opposed healthcare for the poor. Vincent responded with a commercial featuring black activist Marzell Clayton, who insisted that Vincent wanted to reform the Charity hospitals. When Vincent lost the election, a friend told her, “You shouldn’t have put that curly-haired black guy on your TV add.” Vincent also knew that a sexist constituency had led to her loss. One woman expressed the common sentiment toward Vincent’s candidacy when she noted that Vincent should be “home baking cookies.” Still undaunted, Vincent focused her ambitions on city politics.⁵³

Disgusted by the corruption and racial divisiveness in city hall under Mayor Bucklew, Vincent determined to redeem her hometown by running for mayor. She described her campaign as a “David and Goliath,” battle, noting, “of course I’m David.” After spending a fortune on her failed senate campaign, she had a paltry fund for her mayoral bid. Her largest contributor—her mother—gave her \$300, and Vincent solicited a total of \$800 from her former high school classmates. A family friend provided her with an office for her headquarters; another friend donated a telephone; her sister served as an unpaid campaign manager and her niece an unpaid media organizer. Lacking money for mass advertising, Vincent began a tenacious door-to-door campaign to announce her candidacy, explain her goals, and recruit support. She printed her fourfold policy plan to “work with the council; reduce crime; clean up the city; and promote jobs for Laurel” on

⁵³ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview. Eloria Newell, “Vincent, Scoper in Race For Senate,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 24, 1991; Virginia Burkhalter, “Involved in the Community,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 9, 1989; “Susan B. Vincent Senator,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 13, 1991, all in Susan Vincent Vertical File, LRM. For more on Ray Mabus and his progressive proposals, see Nash, Jere and Andy Taggart. *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 196-198, 208-209.

white paper push cards, hole punched by her mother, and hung on doors with yarn by her family and friends.⁵⁴

During the campaign, Vincent grew increasingly empathetic toward black concerns. Because the strength of the black vote had grown in Laurel, all the candidates attended the NAACP mayoral forum, but Vincent moved beyond making a few appearances. She campaigned in black neighborhoods, which helped her seal the Democratic nomination. During the general elections, she intensified these efforts. Dressed in high heels and a business suit, the petite, yet astonishingly indomitable, Vincent strode confidently down the streets as though she belonged in the poor black neighborhood where few whites, especially well-bred white southern belles like her, dared to tread. She may have appeared out of place, but Vincent belonged among a people who understood the frustration of exclusion. Although blacks were shocked to see her in their neighborhoods, most of them found her ideas interesting and her passion for redeeming Laurel infectious. A civil rights veteran, Maycie Gore, considered Vincent the first white candidate to express genuine interest in the black community. Cora Wade-Seals, one of Laurel's most beloved black teachers, was impressed that Vincent walked the streets alone in poor black neighborhoods long past dark as most whites refused to campaign in the inner city during daylight. Although Nichols outspent Vincent \$90,000 to \$8,000, Vincent dominated the black vote. When she won the election by 327 votes, she became the first woman elected mayor in Laurel.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Susan Vincent, interview.

⁵⁵ Susan Vincent, interview; Cora Wade-Seals, interview; Maycie Gore, interview. Johnny Magee, interview, May, 12, 2009 and James Jones, October 1, 2008, both interviews by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. Dana Gower, "Candidates Debate

As mayor, Vincent's steely, but compassionate nature served her well. She never backed down from a fight even when some blacks falsely denigrated her as a racist and whites accused her of catering to blacks. She succeeded in normalizing relations in city government by working with the city council. The promise proved easier to keep than she originally thought because Melvin Mack was the only incumbent council member to win reelection, and all of the winners, except David Ratcliff, were Democrats. Other than Mack, Gaddy was the only member who had maintained popularity in his ward, but he had passed away in February, and NAACP leader Manuel Jones won his old seat. One other member besides Mack, Lula Cooley, had experience on the council as she returned to service after four years away when she soundly defeated incumbent James Jones. Vincent became a popular mayor among the African American council members and the populous because she focused on black neighborhoods to address decades of neglect in the infrastructure, and she tried to rectify racial inequities⁵⁶

By the mid-nineties, Laurel's new governing body had become a harbinger of biracial leadership. Although a few white council members opposed racially progressive policies and proposals, they were outnumbered and outvoted. The citizenry, however, lagged behind as their polarized experiences in their socially and residentially segregated city informed their divergent perspectives over racial issues. Vincent and the council

Issues at NAACP Forum," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 30, 1993; Dana Gower, "It's Vincent v. Nichols," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 19, 1993; "Vincent Wins Mayor's Race," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 9, 1993.

⁵⁶ First quote, Susan Vincent, interview; all other quotes, Johnny Magee, interview. Maycie Gore, interview; Cora Wade-Seals, interview; "Laurel Council Will Have New Faces," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 5, 1993; Dana Gower, "Laurel Council Member Dies," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 1, 1993; Dana Gower, "Brogdon, Bailey Claim Council Seats," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 9, 1993.

confronted one of their greatest racial controversies in 1995 when they attacked the racist milieu at the Laurel Fire Department (LFD). Vincent characterized the firemen as “good ole boys,” and she described most of the chiefs that had served under Bucklew’s mayoral term as overt racists who mistreated black firefighters. In February 1995, Vincent selected Roy Edwards, a white firefighter from Biloxi, as fire chief in hopes that he would clean up the department. Several council members opposed Edwards because they expected the mayor to promote someone from within the LFD. On July 18, Cooley, as president of the council, pushed through Edwards’ confirmation when she brought it to a vote while David Ratcliff, his most outspoken opponent, was out of town. A group of white firefighters filed a complaint with the Civil Service Commission and initiated a lawsuit against the city to force Vincent to appoint a chief from the commission’s list of eligible candidates. When the commission and the court ruled in favor of the firefighters, Vincent appealed.⁵⁷

During the appointment battle, another controversy erupted at the LFD when black firefighters informed Chief Edwards that they objected to wearing the Mississippi flag patch on their uniforms because it contained the symbol of the Confederate battle flag. The black firefighters admired Edwards because he treated them as equals, and as

⁵⁷ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview; Jenny Butts, “Council Approves Fire Chief,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 18, 1995; Jenny Butts, “Vote on New Fire Chief Irks Council Member,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 25, 1995; Laurel City Council Meeting, February 28, 1995, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 69, 80; City Council Meeting, July 18, 1995, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 69, 488, both in Office of the City Clerk, Laurel City Hall, Laurel, Mississippi; *City of Laurel Mississippi v. Firefighters of Laurel, Mississippi* (December 23, 1997), case no. 96-CA-00016 COA, Court of Appeals in the State of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *City of Laurel v. Firefighters* (1997)]; Jenny Butts, “Fight Over Chiefs Will Go to Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 6, 1995; Jenny Butts, “Is Roy Edwards Really Fire Chief?” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 13, 1995; Jenny Butts, “Board Reveals Ruling,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 14, 1995.

they had hoped, he understood their aversion to the flag. Edwards received approval from Mayor Vincent to order new uniforms with firefighter and American flag patches. When the new uniforms arrived in August 1995, Councilman Mack praised the change to reporters, as he emphasized, “I think we, as Americans, have only one flag that unites us. Some other flags offend a lot of Americans. But I hope that Laurel doesn’t become a city divided because of the flag issue.”⁵⁸

To Mack’s great frustration, the removal of the flag incited racial hostilities as blacks and whites held divergent perceptions of the symbol. Publisher Paul Barrett and his city editor, Hal Marx, used their positions at the newspaper to author a series of editorials that condemned Vincent and Edwards for removing the flag. They emphasized that the majority—meaning whites—had the right to decide the symbols that represented their society, and they considered the flag reflective of southern pride, not slavery. Marx called the flag’s removal a capitulation to “cultural victimization” in which minorities demanded apologies for conflicts that ended decades ago. Of course, the Confederacy had ended 130 years ago, but Marx was not focused on the failure of whites to move beyond the past. Blacks responded with outrage to the articles as they perceived the flag as reflective of a society that valued slavery, white supremacy, and the Klan, and they considered racial injustice as a contemporary problem. During the Laurel conflict, the state NAACP and Mississippi authorities were embattled in a series of lawsuits over the flag. The local and state battle over the flag reflected the disparate histories that drove blacks and whites toward dichotomous perceptions. A journalist for the *Clarion-Ledger*,

⁵⁸ Quoting, Jenny Butts, “Fire Chief: ‘No Problem,’” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 11, 1995; Susan Vincent, interview; Jimmie Bunch, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, MOHP recording.

Jerry Mitchell, declared, “Seeing a Confederate battle flag stirs Southerners’ souls as perhaps no other symbol. Some weep, longing for a past that was and is no more. Some cry, loathing a past that was.”⁵⁹

In early September, white Councilman Jones Brogdon proposed a resolution to the council that would allow firefighters to choose whether or not to wear the Mississippi flag on their uniforms. Vincent worried that the vote might pass because whites dominated the council seats. The morning before the regularly held council meeting, she issued an executive order that no flags would be worn on uniforms. Instead, all public safety official uniforms would bear shoulder sleeve patches that identified their department and the city of Laurel. Black and white citizens flocked to the council meeting to debate Vincent’s order and Brogdon’s resolution. A white man, Ted Lightsey, derided Vincent and the chief for removing the flag that he and his family had fought under. Since Lightsey could not have fought for the Confederacy, Lightsey might have been referring to the Klan as several Jones County men with the surname Lightsey had belonged to the White Knights in the 1960s. Pastor Milton Branch castigated the flag as “a symbol of hatred [that] . . . carries a lot of wounds that have been inflicted on blacks.” The black council members also opposed the flag, and as Cooley noted, “it’s a white flag . . . it’s not a unified flag.” Councilman Gordon Myrick, a white Democrat, voted with

⁵⁹ First quote, Hal Marx, “Cultural War Hits Laurel,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 17, 1995; second quote, Jerry Mitchell, “Symbols of Past Not Easily Vanquished,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, November 24, 1997. “Show Elected Officials How You Feel About Flag,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 3, 1995; Paul Barrett, “The Local News is Our Business,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 27, 1995; Harvey L. Warren, “Flag Debate Promotes Discord,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 22, 1995. For lawsuits regarding the flag, see, *Mississippi Division of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans v. Mississippi State Conference of NAACP Branches, et al.*, case no. 94-CA-00615-SCT, Supreme Court of Mississippi, 774 So. 2d 388; 2000 Miss. LEXIS 105.

the three black council members against Brogdon's proposal, and it failed four to three. The Mississippi flag would not be returned to the firefighter's uniforms.⁶⁰

Incensed by the vote, Barrett portrayed Vincent's executive order as unpatriotic, and he castigated her as a sly political player who "has sold her soul for a few minority votes." He also portrayed Councilman Mack as a radical and even claimed that he had threatened to burn the Mississippi flag. Infuriated, Vincent, escorted by Police Chief Jamie Bush, strode determinedly past curious newspaper employees at the *Laurel Leader-Call* building into Barrett's office. As Chief Bush sat down and began reading Barrett's editorial, Vincent implored Barrett to terminate his campaign and stated sternly: "You are pitting the white community against the black community." Barrett spat back that she had caused the trouble. Before Vincent could respond, Councilman Mack stormed past shocked employees and into Barrett's office. He grabbed the paper out of Bush's hands and shouted: "you're saying that I threatened to stomp and burn the Mississippi flag. I didn't say that." Barrett retorted that he had four council members as sources. Furious, Mack shouted: "You're nothing but a murderer, Paul. You kill people. You write these editorials and you don't have to put your name or your face on them." Barrett snatched the newspaper from Mack and pointed to his article: "Here's my name and here's my picture. I am not hiding behind anything, you black son of a bitch." Barrett balled up the paper,

⁶⁰ First quote, Jenny Butts, "I Pledge Allegiance," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 6, 1995; second quote, Lula Cooley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2010, MOHP recording. Susan Vincent, interview; Council Resolution Vote, September 5, 1995, *Laurel City Council Minute Book*, vol. 69, 700-70; Jenny Butts, "Mayor Makes Flag Decision," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 5, 1995; Executive Order V-044, September 5, 1995, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 114, Office of the City Clerk, City Hall, Laurel, Mississippi. For Lightseys who were members of the Klan, see FBI Summary of Dahmer Case, May 19, 1969, DABURN, FBI File, vol. [?], # 44-31694-889, Vernon F. Dahmer Federal Bureau of Investigation File, Robert Helfrich Papers, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as Helfrich Papers].

threw it at him, and charged him. Chief Bush flew out of his seat, threw Barrett off of Mack, and then escorted Mack out of the office as Barrett cursed after him.⁶¹

Racial tension exploded in the wake of the confrontation. Mack filed assault charges against Barrett in city court. He wanted an apology rather than financial compensation, but Barrett refused. Barrett continued to write editorials condemning Vincent and the council's decision, and he printed letters to the editor regarding the conflict, most of which denounced opponents of the state flag. The war of words escalated into action. The Sons of the Confederate Veterans protested at city hall and demanded that the city recall Vincent. Richard Headrick, who owned a sign company, placed an enormous Mississippi flag on a billboard in downtown Laurel with the statement, "IF THIS FLAG OFFENDS YOU . . . LEAVE." President of the local NAACP James Jones denounced the advertisement as offensive. Headrick responded that the removal of the state flag from firefighter uniforms offended "us," which he called the "majority." Jones retorted that as blacks comprised 49.7 percent of Laurel's population and some whites also opposed the flag, the opponents were the majority. To protest the newspaper's support of the flag, NAACP leaders requested that citizens boycott the paper, but then Barrett responded as though he were a victim of black racists. Finally, under orders from the owners of the newspaper, Barrett apologized to Mack for his conduct toward him in his office. Mack dropped the charges against Barrett, and the

⁶¹ First quote, Paul Barrett, "City Hall Sells Out," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 6, 1995; all other quotes, Susan Vincent, interview. Jenny Butts, "I Pledge Allegiance," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 6, 1995. Melvin Mack's version of the confrontation matches Vincent's reiteration; but Paul Barrett's differs slightly as he portrayed Mack as the aggressor. For both Mack and Barrett's versions, see Nikki Davis Maute, "Laurel Councilman Says Publisher Assaulted Him," *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1995; Suzanne Monk, "Councilman Charges Publisher with Assault," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 8, 1995.

tension simmered. In August 1996, Chief Edwards resigned. The following year, the appeals court ruled that the city did not have to seek approval from the commission when it appointed a fire chief, but Vincent had already lost Edwards.⁶²

The fight over the flag reflected the intensity of racial divisions in Laurel, particularly as white proponents stressed that blacks should leave the state if they opposed the Confederate symbol, as if they were not equal citizens with the right to protest a flag, which, at best, excluded them. At least, however, the battle over the flag had united white progressives like Vincent, Myrick, and Edwards with black leaders including Cooley, Mack, and Jones in a common perception that Laurel could never move forward if it clung to symbols of a haunted past that divided the citizenry. Although Vincent reached across the racial divide when she worked with black councilmen and community leaders to launch a war against crime and drugs in black neighborhoods, some blacks accused her of protecting unruly police.

⁶² Quoting Janet Braswell, "Laurel Flag Flap Creates Tidal Wave of Emotions," *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1995. Suzanne Monk, "Councilman Charges Publisher With Assault," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 8, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Laurel Councilman Says Publisher Assaulted Him," *Hattiesburg American*, September 8, 1995; Mae Watts, "Wants Mayor Voted Out of Office," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 8, 1995; Walter Meek, "If You Don't Like the Flag, Move," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 8, 1995; Suzanne Monk, "Newspaper Boycott Threatened," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 9, 1995; Curtis Ainsworth, "Doesn't Blame Publisher," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 11, 1995; Dave Jones, "Confederate Flag Will Eventually Come Down," *Hattiesburg American*, September 12, 1995; Paul Barrett, "It Was a Roller Coaster Week," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 17, 1995; Paul Barrett, "Are We Willing to Pay the Price?" *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 20, 1995; Curtis Ainsworth, "Agrees With Views on the State Flag," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 20, 1995; Paul Barrett, "Do We Build Laurel, or Tear it Down?" *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 1, 1995; *Laurel v. Firefighters* (1997); Susan Vincent, interview; *City of Laurel v. Paul Barrett* (1995), case no. 950012393, Municipal Court, Laurel Law Enforcement Complex, Laurel, Mississippi. Executive Order V-045, September 19, 1995, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 114; Executive Order V-52, March 26, 1996, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 122; Executive Order V-56, August 7, 1996, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 124.

Sporadic accusations of police misconduct emerged during Vincent's tenure, and they often accompanied spikes in gang violence. In April 1994, a wave of gang violence surged in Brown Circle, a black public housing area in ward seven. Residents had grown accustomed to the sounds of gunfire in their neighborhoods, but that spring the violence was worse than usual. On April 20, someone shot a retired firefighter, and burglars shot a resident. The following day, five gang members packed into two vehicles and hunted down Anthony Trotter, a 19-year-old resident of Brown Circle. Trotter rushed down the block, but just as he reached the front of his apartment building, the shooters leaned out of their windows, aimed, and fired some 30 rounds before he could open the door. One bullet hit its mark—penetrating Trotter's lower torso.⁶³

Six days later, on April 27, several members of the Trotter family shot at a vehicle occupied by 33-year-old Joseph Jones. Although police arrested the shooters, the judge released them on \$50,000 bonds. Enraged, Jones stormed city hall and the police department with complaints. Vincent, Councilman Mack, and Chief Bush explained that they lacked the authority to revoke the Trotters' bond, but they promised to increase patrols of Brown Circle. Dissatisfied with their response, Jones convinced Brown Circle residents to picket city hall. The protestors demanded that Mayor Vincent fire Chief Bush and deliver an official pledge to respond to their complaints. Chief Bush prepared to arrest the protestors until Vincent convinced him that an arrest would only "glorify them." A few hours later, the three black council members, Melvin Mack, Manuel Jones, and Lula Cooley, arranged to meet with the protestors in the city council chambers. Vincent tried to stop them. She looked at Mack and exclaimed, "Melvin, it's like getting

⁶³ Eloria Newell James, "Residents of Laurel Become Accustomed to 'A lot of Shootings'" *Hattiesburg American*, April 22, 1994; Susan Vincent, interview.

in a pissing contest with a skunk.” When she failed to convince them, she joined the meeting.⁶⁴

Once in the meeting room, Vincent grew annoyed with Joseph Jones. According to talk on the street, Jones had arranged the drive-by attack on Trotter, and the Trotter family had attacked Jones in retaliation. Yet Jones took over the meeting by portraying himself and all blacks residing in Brown Circle as the victims of a racist police chief. Mack prevented Jones from turning the conflict into a racial divide when he defended Chief Bush. He argued that gang violence, not the chief, was the problem. Then he asked the Jones clan to remain quiet for awhile and allow other attendees to express their opinions. Enraged, Jones and his family stormed out of the room. Afterward, a productive discussion between the Brown Circle residents and the politicians began. That night, Mayor Vincent and the council announced on the evening news that they stood behind Chief Bush. They also pledged to reduce crime in Brown Circle. For weeks, police vigilantly patrolled the area, and the violence and complaints against the LPD dissipated.⁶⁵

Over the next four years, Vincent’s programs including bar checks, loitering ordinances, road blocks, and drug raids elicited criticism from African Americans as many of them claimed that she disproportionately implemented these programs in the black community. Vincent attended meetings held by African Americans, listened to their concerns, and reiterated her belief that the programs proved necessary, that the city had

⁶⁴ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview. Eloria Newell James, “Laurel Protest,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 29, 1994.

⁶⁵ Susan Vincent, interview. Eloria Newell James, “Laurel Protest,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 29, 1994.

implemented them in all neighborhoods but had concentrated them in those areas that experienced the most crime, and that she would continue in the same vein because it was working. Crime decreased under Vincent though some blacks complained that law enforcement achieved that feat through harassment and intimidation of black citizens. Likely, Laurel blacks experienced a similar frustration to their Hattiesburg counterparts over the implementation of the drug war. For surely, whites in Laurel were using and selling drugs around the same rates as whites across the nation which suggests that city leaders and police should have employed the same tactics to counter drug crimes in white and black communities. However, Vincent and the LPD leaders genuinely believed that they were trying to help black communities with their tough crime policies.⁶⁶

Joseph Jones became the most vocal opponent of the LPD and of Vincent. He so despised Mayor Vincent that he sought to destroy her political career by distributing letters across the black community that alleged that Vincent belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, and he compared her to Hitler. Over the years, Vincent received much aid in her struggle against Jones from blacks, particularly Tyrone Stewart, an African American police officer who perceived black-on-black violence as the gravest threat to the black community in Laurel. Stewart, a former college football player with degrees in criminal justice and psychology, became a patrolman in 1994, and he proved quickly his talent for policing. Within a few years, Chief Bush promoted Stewart to detective because he had developed more felony cases than the combined cases of all the other officers in the department. Stewart and Vincent grew so close over the years that he considered her a second mother, and he defended her adamantly against Jones. According to Stewart,

⁶⁶ Susan Vincent, interview.

Jones was a career criminal who used the race card against Vincent to shield his illegal activities. Stewart credited Vincent's roadblocks and her endorsement of community policing with radically reducing crime in Laurel and improving relations between the LPD and the community.⁶⁷ These biracial relationships that flourished between city leaders and public servants and the cooperative biracial relations at the core of city leadership eased racial tensions and guided the city toward progress and development.

The mayor and the council forged an important biracial effort to grow the city of Laurel by supporting unanimously a plan to annex parcels of Jones County that included two white communities and two black communities. Although most black residents in the proposed annexed parcels favored annexation, their white counterparts generally opposed it. The latter formed an anti-annexation group to fight the city's petition in chancery court. The case dragged on for years and increasingly incited racial hostilities across the county. Despite the opposition, during the 1990s city leaders and African American residents promoted a biracial effort to bring annexation to fruition. Progressive city leadership also fostered a cordial election season even though Vincent faced a tough race against Melvin Mack, a popular black councilman. Vincent and Mack avoided dividing the races during the campaign as they focused on the issues rather than on race. Vincent handily won the race. The racial demographics were shifting, but whites still maintained a slight majority, and Vincent was still popular in the black community. The white

⁶⁷ Tyrone Stewart, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, MOHP recording. Susan Vincent, interview; List of new police officers, June 16, 1994, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 97; Promotion of Tyrone Stewart, June 16, 2005, *Laurel Administrative Minute Book*, vol. 3, 223. For complaints of police brutality, see, James Jones, interview, October 1, 2008; Citizens Forum, August [?], 1995, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 69, 499; City Council Meeting, April 21, 1998, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 74, 397-97.

majority also ensured that despite challenges by some black candidates in traditionally white wards, whites won and maintained their four-to-three majority on the council.⁶⁸

Initially, in the early months of the newly elected government, racial divisiveness emerged. Lula Cooley lost her seat in a tight race to Johnny Magee. As Vincent and Cooley had grown close, Vincent resented Councilman Magee. The sentiment was mutual, as Magee had “hated white people” for decades after ugly encounters with whites during the Civil Rights Movement and the integration of Watkins High School. He had yet to fully recover from the wounds of those violent and difficult Jim Crow years. During a council meeting, he informed Vincent that as child, he had gone to her father’s clinic for treatment, but her father made him wait all day in the “colored waiting room,” and he had never examined him. The comment wounded Vincent because she long ago had divested herself of her segregationist beliefs, and she had toiled for black equality during her first tenure as mayor. She responded that in the Jim Crow days, white doctors had to follow the rules of segregation and have separate waiting rooms, and she stressed that often her father could not treat all the patients that packed his waiting room. She expressed empathy for his suffering under Jim Crow, but she asked him not to judge her on the past. Magee accepted Vincent’s candid response as an olive branch that he

⁶⁸ Susan Vincent, interview. Annexation Ordinance, June 17, 1997, *Laurel City Council Minutes Book*, vol. 73, 371-383; Appellate briefs and court ruling, *City of Laurel, Mississippi v. Sharon Waterworks Association, Shady Grove Utility District, Shady Grove Water Association, Other Objectors* (2009), case no. 2007-AN-01547-SCT, Clerk’s Office for the Supreme Court of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi “Thanks Susan for Twelve Years of Service,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 27, 2005; Tyrone Stewart, interview; Maycie Gore, interview; Cora Wade-Seals, interview; Susan Vincent, interview; “Meet Laurel’s Mayoral Candidates,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 1, 1997; Richard Strength, “Mack Decides to Run as Independent,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 3, 1997; Jimmy Pippen, “Vincent Wins Big in Democratic Mayor Primary,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 7, 1997; Jimmy Pippen, “Vincent Re-elected Mayor of Laurel,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 4, 1997.

accepted, though tentatively. Over the next several years, Vincent's leadership convinced Magee that she was sensitive to racial issues. During her second tenure, she and the council members held a public hearing regarding decaying properties owned by the Magee family's former landlord. Before the hearing, Magee told Vincent that in his childhood home, "the screens were all torn up and the bugs came in and bit us, but every Friday Mr. Decker came to get his rent money. . . . The roof leaked and the water came in, but every Friday Mr. Decker came and picked his rent up. In the winter time, it was so cold in the house that the water would freeze, but every Friday Mr. Decker came to pick his rent up." The story moved Vincent, and she and the council ordered Decker to fix his properties immediately or lose them. During his years on the council, Magee's hatred toward whites as a race dissipated as he befriended whites who held progressive racial views. By the turn of the century, Magee and Vincent had cemented a lifelong friendship.⁶⁹

The biracial cooperation in the governing bodies allowed Vincent and the council to continue their attacks on crime, neighborhood decay, and racial prejudice, and to launch economic projects to revitalize Laurel. In Forrest County, some blacks and whites also rose above racial divides to forge biracial cooperation, but only after polarizing racial battles finally drove racial progressives to the forefront of the racial struggle. The most significant biracial crusade involved a battle for retributive justice that connected Jones and Forrest counties again by their tragic racial past. It began in 1990, when the Dahmer family renewed its effort to bring Jones County Klansmen to justice for the 1966 murder of Vernon F. Dahmer.

⁶⁹ Last quote Johnny Magee, interview; all other quotes, Susan Vincent, interview. Terri M. Smith to Carolyn Payne, Council Members 1992 to the Present.

Since Jimmy Finch had closed the Klan case in the 1970s, the Dahmers had intermittently requested its reopening. Their hope was renewed on December 14, 1990, when a Hinds County grand jury charged Byron De La Beckwith with the 1963 murder of Medgar Evers. They were further encouraged when Myrlie, Evers' widow, demanded that Mississippi establish a "Nuremberg-type commission to investigate old civil rights atrocities and hunt down the criminals, just as the Jews had pursued the Nazis after the war." When the Dahmers met with Forrest County District Attorney Glen White in January 1991, however, he emphasized that the state no longer had copies of the 1960s trial transcripts, rendering it difficult to reintroduce the case. Furthermore, he insisted that he would confront a legal albatross if he attempted to try suspects a quarter of a century after the commission of the crime. The Dahmers reminded him that Mississippi had no statute of limitations on murder or arson. White promised to reexamine the case, but whenever the Dahmers contacted him, he claimed he had yet to find anything to allow him to move forward. Even after Jackson jurors convicted Beckwith in early 1994, proving that Klan cold cases could be prosecuted successfully, White rebuffed the Dahmers' request to pursue justice for them.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Quoting Maryanne Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi: The Murder of Medgar Evers, the Trials of Byron De La Beckwith and the Haunting of the New South* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995), 385, *Ibid.*, 259-264. "Killed by the Klan," prod. and dir. by Charles C. Stuart, Discovery Channel, Stuart Productions, Inc., 1999, videocassette; Christopher Sullivan, "Authorities Reopen Case of Race-related Deep South Murders," *Sunday Advocate*, November 3, 1991, in Series II State v. Charles Noble, Helfrich Papers, McCain, USM. Jerry Mitchell, "1966 Slaying Gets Another Look," *The Clarion-Ledger*, May 28, 1991; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Case Reviewed," *Hattiesburg American*, May 28, 1991; Nikki Davis Maute, "Forrest County Trial Took Lead in Slowing KKK," *Hattiesburg American*, January 6, 1991; Nikki Davis Maute, "It's Our Time Now," *Hattiesburg American*, February 7, 1994; Nikki Davis Maute, "Focus Now on Murder of Activist," *Hattiesburg American*, n. d., Dahmer Vertical File, McCain, USM.

Frustrated, the Dahmers contacted Reverend Fairley and requested his aid. On February 8, Fairley formed the Citizens for Justice, and he brought in Douglass Baker as his co-chair to help him lobby local, state, and federal officials to reopen the case. The biracial support Fairley amassed for the reopening of the Dahmer case proved a promising step toward racial justice and reconciliation. By March 1994, the NAACP, SCLC, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Center for Democratic Renewal, the Anti Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and seven leaders from the mostly white churches of the Hattiesburg Interfaith Alliance had joined the campaign. The Forrest County Board of Supervisors and the Hattiesburg City Council both voted unanimously in favor of reopening the case. Meanwhile, Fairley contacted Deavours Nix, who admitted with arrogance that he had participated in the conspiracy to kill Dahmer. Still, he claimed erroneously that Dahmer did not die from the fire, but rather from an overdose of morphine administered to him by a “nigger doctor.” Fairley stated with forced calm, “Mr. Nix, God knows there is a heaven and a hell—” he stopped himself and slammed down the telephone before the Klansman could respond. Fairley delivered the statement to Jerry Mitchell, *The Clarion-Ledger* reporter whose exposes on the Klan and civil rights murders had helped the Evers reopen the Beckwith case.⁷¹

⁷¹ Quoting, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview by Reverend Howell, February 5, 1998, 2; Jerry Mitchell, summary of interview with Kenneth Fairley for *The Clarion-Ledger*, n. d., both in Miscellaneous Klan Information, Helfrich Papers. Nikki Davis Maute, “Focus Now on Murder of Activist,” *Hattiesburg American*, n. d., Vernon F. Dahmer Vertical File, McCain, USM; Nikki Davis Maute, “Group Wants Dahmer Case Reopened,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 9, 1994; Nikki Davis Maute, “FBI Aids in Dahmer Investigation,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 11, 1994; Jerry Mitchell, “Momentum Growing to Try Bowers,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 1994; Nikki Davis Maute, “White Clergy Advocate Dahmer Probe,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 12, 1994; Brent Christensen, “Hattiesburg Council Backs Stronger Dahmer Inquiry,” *Hattiesburg*

The publicity forced White to act. He acquired appropriated funds from the state legislature to hire lawyer Michael Callahan as a special investigator. Callahan worked with White's investigator Arlon Moulds, the police chief in the 1970s accused by Fairley of encouraging brutality against blacks. Moulds had knowledge of the Dahmer case because in the 1960s he was one of the detectives assigned to the original investigation. White promised that he and his investigators would pursue every possible lead, but it soon became apparent that they were searching for evidence to dismiss the case. His office focused on the six-man theory, a lead originally developed in early 1966 after Klan informant Delmar Dennis reported to FBI agents that Bowers told him that he had ordered six men to murder Dahmer: Cecil Sessum, Henry DeBoxtel, Billy Moss, Pete Martin, Charles Lowe, and Cliff Lowe. The six-man theory contradicted Billy Roy Pitts' 1960s testimony that led to four convictions in the case. Pitts agreed that Bowers had ordered the murder and that Sessum and DeBoxtel were the ringleaders. But the rest of his list of participants differed, and it included more men: William Thomas Smith, Charles Wilson, Charles Noble, Lester Thornton, Franklin Lyons, and himself. White sought to prove that since the FBI's contradictory theories rendered it impossible to determine any Klansmen's guilt, he could not indict anyone.⁷²

However, Callahan and Mould's investigation failed to produce evidence

American, March 9, 1994; City Council Meeting, March 8, 1994, *City of Hattiesburg, City Hall Minute Book*, vol. 1994-1, 496, Office of City Clerk, City Hall, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

⁷² Jerry Mitchell, "Funds Sought for New Trial in Dahmer Killing," *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 8, 1994; Jerry Mitchell, "Ex-lineman Probes Rights-era Case," *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 25, 1994; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Case Investigator," *Hattiesburg American*, April 1, 1994, all in Vernon F. Dahmer Vertical File, McCain, USM; Delmar Dennis Summary of [Possible] Testimony, n. d., Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers, McCain.

supporting the six-man theory. When they met with Dennis in August 1994, the former Klan informant claimed that he only had a vague recollection of his meetings with Bowers, and he professed that he could not recall the identities of the men Bowers named as the perpetrators. Next, investigators approached Klansman Arnold Ingram because his statements in the 1960s corroborated Dennis's original statement. However, the old Klansman had since undergone brain surgery to remove a tumor which affected his memory, and he claimed that he could no longer recall anything about the murder. Many of the old Klansmen either refused to cooperate or insisted that they knew nothing about the incident. Sessum warned Callahan to stop investigating the case. DeBoxtel was deceased, and White could not locate any information on the whereabouts of Lester Thornton. Still, he failed to contact many of the living Klansmen including Pitts. Furthermore, as White had never demanded that the FBI send him the entire 40,000 page DABURN (Dahmer Burning) file, his team gathered their incomplete evidence from a smattering of records. Of course, White never wanted to reopen the case. Within six months, he assigned Callahan to other cases and later promoted him to assistant district attorney.⁷³

Furious, the Dahmers enlisted the help of the National Council of Churches Racial Justice Program, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressman Bennie Thompson, and they opened themselves to nationally televised interviews. By March

⁷³ Statement of Cecil Victor Sessum, July 5, 1994; Statement of Delmar Dennis, August 9, 1994; Statement of Arnold Ingram, May 2, 1994; Defendants in Summary of Dahmer Incident, n. d., all in Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. Jerry Mitchell, "FBI Withholding Files in '66 Slaying," *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 17, 1994; Nikki Davis Maute, "Ex-district Attorney Says Pitts is Not Credible Dahmer Witness," *Hattiesburg American*, January 20, 1998; Janet Braswell and Nikki Davis Maute, "Standstill," *Hattiesburg American*, January 8, 1995; Jerry Mitchell, "Reno's Help Sought," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 16, 1995.

1995, the publicity inspired Attorney General Janet Reno to order the FBI to send the entire unredacted file to White. The new President of the Forrest County NAACP Nathan Jordan demanded that Callahan move to Jackson to accelerate the reading of the 40,000-page file. Callahan refused. After a few months, White announced that the files lacked the evidence needed to pursue indictments, and he planned to close the case before he left office that winter. 1995 was an election year and the Citizens for Justice made the Dahmer case a dominant issue. The Dahmer family supported Democratic candidate Cliff Gaddis after he promised that he would make the Dahmer investigation his top priority. Neither of the Republican candidates, Tracy Klein and Lindsay Carter, made such promises. After Carter won the election in November, he pleasantly surprised the Dahmers by arranging a meeting with them immediately. Vernon Dahmer, Jr. informed Carter that his family's grief was as powerful as those who mourned loved ones murdered in the recent April homegrown terrorist attack on the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. As he noted, "Innocent people were killed for no logical reason. Whether it happened last year or 30 years ago, our father was murdered and justice has not been served." Carter promised to pursue every lead. The removal of White from office and the rise of Carter caused an important shift in Forrest County justice because White was part of an old guard that protected white privilege, while Carter was part of a new guard that strove to ensure equal justice.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Quoting Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmers Hope DA Will Take Action," *Hattiesburg American*, January 7, 1996. Lindsay Carter, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), February 5, 2005, MOHP recording. Nikki Davis Maute, "A Family Pursues Justice," *Hattiesburg American*, March 5, 1995; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "FBI Open Vernon Dahmer Files," *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 17, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Local Office to Get All of Dahmer Files," *Hattiesburg American*, March 14, 1995; Janet Braswell and Nikki Davis Maute, "Standstill," *Hattiesburg American*, January 8, 1995;

In 1996, as Carter and his Dahmer team scoured dark corners for evidence against old Klansmen, Forrest and Jones counties became linked once again in a battle for racial justice. The Dahmer team diligently pursued the DABURN case with the aid of federal and state officials, and these efforts set the Central Piney Woods on a road toward redemption. Federal Judge Charles Pickering, a citizen of Laurel, approved a request by the district attorney's office to open sealed federal records in the DABURN case.

Mississippi Attorney General Michael Moore sent two of his investigators, Bill East and Raymond Howell, to assist in the case. When Assistant District Attorney Robert Helfrich assumed lead counsel on the case, he spent many late nights in the recesses of the Forrest County courthouse reading the entire 40,000 page FBI file. As he learned of the Klan hatred that ended Vernon Dahmer's life, he thought often of Dahmer's youngest son, Dennis—only 12-years-old at the time of the murder. When Helfrich was the same age, he had watched his father die of lung cancer. He knew the pain of becoming a fatherless child at that age when a boy began the passage toward manhood and needed his father most. Helfrich's mother, like Ellie Dahmer, never remarried so he understood the sadness of a widowed home. One night, Helfrich scrawled across his notes "30 . . . years ago is not that long ago . . . life changing events are etched in your brain. They will always be there like yesterday—my father's last breath—the fire burning your home in the middle

Jerry Mitchell, "Reno's Help Sought," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 16, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Investigator Says Dahmer Case Active," *Hattiesburg American*, February 16, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Documents Overwhelm Family," *Hattiesburg American*, April 26, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Wants DA Out of Picture," *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Group Vows to Make Case an Election Issue," *Hattiesburg American*, March 5, 1995; Nikki Davis Maute, "Dahmer Investigation Fuels Political Fire," *Hattiesburg American*, July 26, 1995; Janet Braswell, "Carter Captures DA Race," *Hattiesburg American*, November 8, 1995.

of the night—the skin hanging off of his arms.” For Helfrich, the case became a crusade.⁷⁵

To reinstate the indictments, Helfrich needed proof of jury tampering, a new witness, new evidence, and transcripts from a previous trial. Through a meticulous perusal of FBI files, Carter’s office found evidence proving that the Klan had tampered with the 1960s juries and summaries of the transcripts of Bowers’ 1960s murder and arson trials. In hopes of acquiring a new witness with new evidence, Ellie Dahmer appeared on television requesting help from anyone who had knowledge of the crime. In Gulfport, Bob Stringer saw the broadcast and felt his conscience stir again. He was in a 12-step program for gamblers, which compelled him to atone for his sins. At the age of 14, Stringer had started working for Bowers as an errand boy and as a typist and distributor for the *Klan Ledger*. One night, he overheard Bowers ordering Dahmer’s murder. At the time, he loved Bowers like a father, for his own parents had abandoned him, and Bowers treated him like a son. Still, his knowledge of the killing troubled him for decades. So, he called Vernon, Jr. and told him his story. As Helfrich hoped to find more witnesses and evidence to strengthen the case, officers fitted Stringer with a digital recorder to elicit information from Nix’s wife, Sybil. During their conversations, Sybil informed Stringer that Nix “was lucky he didn’t get caught on that Dahmer deal. He give

⁷⁵ Quoting Robert Helfrich Legal Pad Notes, Created Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. Lindsay Carter, interview; Jerry Mitchell, “Prosecutors Want Justice Served,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 17, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, “Meeting Dahmer Family Spurred Investigators,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 16, 1998, Sam Bowers Vertical File, USM; Jerry Mitchell, “Federal Authorities Help State Reconstruct Dahmer Murder Case,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, May 10, 1998; “Dahmer: Judge Oks Request to Open Records,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, May 22, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, “Dahmer Case Carries Risks for Moore,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 15, 1998; Nikki Davis Maute, “Attorney General Joins Dahmer,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 13, 1997.

orders on that thing.” Bowers, she emphasized, initiated it, but Nix handed down the actual orders.⁷⁶ In early 1998, Carter decided it was time to bring in Billy Roy Pitts.

Since his release from federal prison in 1971, Pitts had spent the rest of his troubled existence in Denham Springs, Louisiana. For decades, he feared that his former Klan brothers would find him and kill him, and he suffered from several physical maladies, including heart problems and ulcers. A tortured soul, he could never keep a job long, and he mistreated anyone who tried to love him. His first wife, Bonnie, divorced him because he committed adultery and neglected his children. After a short marriage with Lucille Prine, he had a tumultuous relationship with his third wife, Rachel Smith. Pitts became addicted to pain medication, and during a drug-induced state, he barreled through a glass door and threatened to harm Smith and his mother-in-law. Afterward, he spent a few weeks in a mental hospital, but nothing seemed to cure his broken mind. Mostly, his past tormented him. He often woke in the dark of night, haunted by dreams of murdering Dahmer. When the Mississippi Department of Corrections issued a warrant for his arrest because he had never served his state sentence, Pitts sent a statement to Carter in which he promised to testify for the Dahmers, but he reminded him that the

⁷⁶ Quoting Sybil Nix and Bob Stringer conversation, January 29, 1998, case no. 980027-W, transcript by Jim Gilliland, 11-13, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers. For new witness, see, “Killed by the Klan”; Jerry Mitchell, “Guilty Conscience,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 2, 1998; Vernon Dahmer, Jr., interview by Re ‘Tina D. Gray, April 1, 2001, MOHP recording; Joanna Weis, “Justice Served as Man Finally Talks,” *The Times-Picayune*, August 22, 1998. For informant reports regarding Sam Bowers, see, Roy K. Moore, to Edwin B. Zeigler, December 11, 1967, Series V: Notebooks: *State v. Sam Bowers*. For FBI summary of Bowers 1968 arson trial, see FBI File on Sam Holloway Bowers, Jr., May 27, 1968, FBI File, #44-31694-713, Series V: Notebooks: *State v. Sam Bowers*. For 1969 FBI summary of Bowers 1968 murder trial, see FBI Teletype, January 22, 1969, FBI File, #s 44-31694-807 through 911, Series V: Notebooks: *State v. Sam Bowers*. For jury tampering information, see Collection of FBI files, “Various Notes,” Helfrich Subject Files, Misc.; Lee Martin, Jury Tampering Info and Memo, February 7, 1998, Helfrich Subject Files, Helfrich Papers.

Department of Justice and local prosecutors had agreed to release him after he testified and served his federal sentence. Pitts feared returning to prison, but his conscience troubled him. Within a few days, Pitts surrendered.⁷⁷

Helfrich still hoped they could turn another Klansmen so Investigator East contacted Nix and informed him that the district attorney planned to move forward with indictments. Since he learned that Nix was ill with lung cancer, he would offer him immunity if he told him what he knew. Nix's voice shook as he explained that he could not come forward because "I got to live in this community." East appealed to Nix's fear of death when he asserted, "a man was killed and it was wrong and . . . you fixing to go meet your Maker." Still, Nix refused to confess. East also tracked down former FBI witness T. W. Rogers. When East pledged to subpoena the old Klansman to testify, Rogers shouted, "I've had to live with what I've done." East reminded him that the Dahmer family had to live with what he had done too, and they deserved justice.⁷⁸

By late spring, the Dahmer team was focused on prosecuting Bowers and Nix

⁷⁷ Billy Roy Pitts, statement, January 30, 1998, audiocassette, *State v. Charles Noble*; Medical Report State Louisiana Hospital, Helfrich Subject Files (Billy Roy Pitts): M-N; FBI Memo to Director, from SAC, Jackson, DABURN File, vol. 57, #44-1512-4778; Billy Roy Pitts, Divorce Papers, Created Subject Files: Defense Exhibits, R-V; Petition for Damages, February 13, 1979 and Judgment October 4, 1979 in case of *Lea Smith v. Billy Roy Pitts*, Created Subject Files: Defense Exhibits: R-V, all in Helfrich Papers. Jerry Mitchell, "Life Sentence Nets No State Time," *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 17, 1998; "Dahmer Case," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 7, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, "Ex-Klansman Pitts Surrenders," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 10, 1998.

⁷⁸ Last quote, T. Webber Rogers conversation with Bill East, March 26, 1998, audiocassette, *State v. Charles Noble*; all other quotes, Deavours Nix taped telephone conversation with Bill East, April 6, 1998, audiocassette; Deavours Nix taped telephone conversation with Bill East, February 23, 1998, audiocassette, all in *State v. Charles Noble*, A-F, Helfrich Papers. Jerry Mitchell, "Meeting Dahmer Family Spurred Investigators," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 16, 1998, Sam Bowers Vertical File, McCain, USM.

because they were the ringleaders, and Charles Noble because he was the only participant still living who had never faced prosecution. Noble would prove the most difficult to prosecute because he had become a wealthy and well-connected Sanderson Farms executive. Conversely, Bowers had few acquaintances and even fewer friends. He had never sought to repent for his violent past. In an interview in 1994, he romanticized his role in the massive resistance era as that of a “warrior priest,” leading his crusading soldiers against the civil rights “heretics.” He concluded that “when heretics arise, the priests respond with a calculated and confident militancy; for heresy cannot be forgiven, it can only be eliminated.” By 1998, however, Bowers inhabited a world in which the “heretics” had risen to powerful positions and had made alliances with powerful white progressives. As of 1998, 18,000 blacks were registered to vote in the county, which also meant blacks would be in the jury pool and likely on the jury that decided Bowers’ fate. Finally, Pitts, who had brought down Bowers’ great Invisible Empire decades ago, prepared to ensure Bowers’ elimination. Pitts was still seeking his redemption, and he was more than willing to sacrifice Bowers for his expiation. In early 1998, Ellie Dahmer told a reporter that she and her family knew that “until there is justice, we will never know peace.” By late May, Carter, Helfrich, and Moore believed that they could finally deliver peace to the Dahmers. On May 27, 1998, they reactivated the 1966 murder and arson indictment against Bowers and Noble, and an arson indictment against Nix.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ First and second quotes, Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 63; *Ibid.*, 64; third quote, Nikki Davis Maute, “Dahmer Family Still Searching for Justice,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 1998. Adam Cohen, “Widow and the Wizard,” *Time Magazine*, May 18, 1998, 72-75. Deavours Nix arrest sheet, May 28, 1998, tracking no. 0000741167; Charles Nobles arrest sheet, May 28, 1998, tracking no. 0000741175, Sam Holloway Bowers, Jr. arrest sheet, tracking no. 000074106X, Created Subject Files, Helfrich Papers, [hereinafter cited as arrest

On May 28, officers jailed all three Klansman. A sea of reporters snapped photographs of Bowers as officers led him to his arraignment. The 73-year-old frail man, clothed in an orange jumpsuit, shackled, and handcuffed, his eyes full of fear, no longer fit the image of the Imperial Wizard. Mississippi no longer fit the image of its white supremacist terror days either. Three black deputies guarded Bowers. Attorney General Moore harbored no sympathy for the accused as he stressed the irony that Nix, suffering from lung cancer, arrived with his oxygen tank “complaining . . . that the radiology burned his lungs up. Guess what? That’s exactly how Mr. Dahmer died.” The citizenry’s responses to the arrests ran the gamut. Some residents represented the darkness of the past. Helfrich and Moore received hate phone calls and hate mail, prompting Helfrich to arm himself. Still, Helfrich found comfort among the many locals who considered the prosecution of Klansmen long overdue. When friends asked Carter why he had pursued the cold case after all these years, he asked them if someone murdered their fathers, would they champion the killers’ freedom because they had gotten away with it for so long? Bowers was a murderer. He belonged in prison. Although many whites in Jones County opposed the trial, others supported efforts to redeem the state from its past by sending “terrorists” to prison. As expected, Bowers and his old henchmen all entered pleas of not guilty.⁸⁰

sheets, Helfrich Papers]. Robert Helfrich, interview by Patricia Buzard, October 10, 2001, MOHP recording.

⁸⁰ First quote, Janet Braswell, “Noble May Be Tried in September,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 1998; second quote, Vern Geddie, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett) July 21, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 445. Sheriff Larry Dykes, interview, Sarah Entrenkin, interview, July 26, 2006, D. L. Geiger, interview, July 26, 2006 all by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 24, 2006, in *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 250, 344, 483, MOHP; Robert Helfrich, interview by Patricia (Buzard)

The arrest of the Imperial Wizard and two of his minions marked a momentous opportunity for Forrest County to prove that it had changed by delivering retributive justice for a haunting Klan crime. Moore, Carter, Helfrich and their team understood the enormity of their role in the historic case and embraced the extraordinary task set before them. The Dahmer team knew that despite great changes in Mississippi, white supremacy had not vanished, and a Klan sympathizer on the jury could force a mistrial. To prevent such a catastrophe, the district attorney's office sent out a questionnaire to persons in the jury pool, and they hired juror consultant Andrew Shelton to help weed out racists. On August 17, prosecutors used 11 peremptory challenges to strike whites from the jury panel, and the defense employed 12 challenges to remove six blacks and six whites. By evening, the attorneys had selected a jury of six whites, five blacks, and one Asian, and Judge Richard McKenzie sequestered them.⁸¹

Boyett, October 10, 2001, MOHP recording; Lindsay E. Carter, interview. Deavours Nix arrest sheet; Charles Nobles arrest sheet; Sam Holloway Bowers, Jr. arrest sheet; Helfrich Papers. Paul Hendrickson, "From the Fires of Hate, An Ember of Hope," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1998, Subject Files, C-F, *State v. Charles Noble*, Helfrich Papers. Jerry Mitchell, "Klan Leader Bowers to Stand Trial Again," *The Clarion-Ledger* May, 29, 1998; Chuck Abadie, "Maybe Now Dahmers Can Get Some Answers," *Hattiesburg American*, Friday, May 29, 1998; L. Rennee James, "Media Swarms on Arrest," *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 1998; Janet Braswell, "Bowers Arrested," *Hattiesburg American*, May 28, 1998. "A Bit of History," *Hattiesburg American*, June 1, 1999. Meeting Dahmer Family Spurred Investigators," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 16, 1998; Nikki Davis Maute, "Bowers' Trial Date on Target," *Hattiesburg American*, Tuesday, July 14, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, "Ex-head of KKK Says He's Ready to Face Trial," *The Clarion-Ledger*, July 14, 1998; Renee James, "Media Swarms on Arrest Story," *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, "Dahmer Case Carries Risks for Moore," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 15, 1998; Janet Braswell, "Helfrich Bears," *Hattiesburg American*, June 1, 1998. For images of Bowers, see Kim Harris-Gullory, photographs in *Hattiesburg American*, May 28, 1998.

⁸¹ Juror Questionnaires, Created Subject Files, Helfrich Papers; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "Lawyers Seek Expert Advice During Jury-screening," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 17, 1998; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "Jury Chosen After a Series of Exclusions,"

The trial opened in a theatrical fashion as journalists and crowds flocked to the courtroom under the protection of a phalanx of some 35 law enforcement officers stationed around and inside the courthouse, and they passed through a security system before entering the courtroom. Two white men from Georgia stood across the street from the courthouse carrying signs that declared, “WHITE REVOLUTION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION.” During the trial, Richard Barrett, an infamous white supremacist from Jackson, passed out pamphlets entitled, “The Crimes of Vernon Dahmer,” and called on the spectators to attend a white supremacist rally. Judge McKenzie lambasted Barrett for his propaganda and reminded him “Dahmer is the victim in the case we’re trying here.” These lone white supremacists became lost in a sea of black faces as civil rights veterans found themselves drawn to the courtroom.⁸²

During opening arguments and throughout the trial, Helfrich captivated the audience and jurors as he wove the evidence into a southern tragedy of an evil Klansman who ordered the murder of a devout and patriotic farmer and family man because he had fought for his constitutional right to vote. Helfrich presented essentially the same evidence and witnesses that the prosecutors had presented during the 1960s trials.

The Clarion-Ledger, Tuesday, August 18, 1998; “Former KKK Leader Bowers is on Trial,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 1998.

⁸² First quote, Monica P. Carter, “Supremacists Ignored,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 1998; second quote *State of Mississippi v. Sam Holloway Bowers* (1998), case no. 6922 vol. 4, transcript, 89, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, [hereafter cited as *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998), transcript]; *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 88-94, vol. 1., 4-120. For security, see, Billy McGee, interview; Charlie Sims, interview. Monica P. Carter, “Media Outnumber Spectators,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 19, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, “Bowers Trial Reunites Civil Rights Activists,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 21, 1998; Richard Barrett, Extremism in America, Anti-Defamation League website: http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/barrett.asp?xpicked=2&item=barrettfirst (accessed June 2008).

Testimony by Pitts and a string of Klan informants combined with FBI files proved that Bowers ordered the murder, and several informants testified that Bowers bragged about how well his men followed his orders to kill the civil rights activists. As Pitts explained the attack on the home, he recalled with torment hearing the sound of Vernon Dahmer's voice, calling "out in distress." The only new witness, Stringer, testified that three nights before the murder, he overheard Bowers and DeBoxtel plan the attack. FBI agents and ballistic experts linked the evidence found at the scene to Pitts' rendition of the attack, and agents highlighted informant reports that revealed that Bowers had ordered Dahmer's murder.⁸³

The defense failed to invalidate the evidence but rather relied on conspiracy theories that harkened back to a bygone era and no longer resonated with most Mississippians. Bowers had foolishly hired Travis Buckley, an old Klan buddy, to represent him, even though it was well known that in the 1960s Buckley had been indicted on charges of conspiracy in the Dahmer murder. Moreover, Buckley lacked all the charisma Helfrich possessed, and his clumsy opening statement set the tone for his weak defense. Buckley staged a melodramatic tale of Bowers as a tragic figure, who in the 1960s, fell victim to a federal conspiracy designed to destroy Mississippi sovereignty, and who in the 1990s, became a political pawn in "a media orchestrated and politically driven prosecution—a persecution." Buckley claimed that during the sixties, the FBI and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) used the mafia to torture whites until they delivered false statements against Bowers. He even falsely claimed that investigative

⁸³ Quoting *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998), transcript, vol. 3, 24. *Ibid.*, vol. 1 - vol. 5; Opening Statement, *State of Mississippi v. Sam Bowers* (1998), audiocassette recording, Created Subject Files, Helfrich Papers; Andy Shelton, trial notes, Created Subject Files, Helfrich Papers.

journalist Jack Nelson in his book *Terror in the Night* revealed that the FBI ambushed Klansmen in hopes of murdering Bowers. Buckley also called Nix to the stand to testify that FBI agents had warned him that if he refused to implicate Bowers in Dahmer's murder, they would harm his family. Nix admitted that he was a Klansmen so he could state that Bowers was never a member, much less the Imperial Wizard. The lies backfired. Agent James Ingram denounced the federal conspiracy angle as lies and testified that Nelson never made accusations his book, but rather Nelson proved that Bowers was the Imperial Wizard of Mississippi's violent Klan.⁸⁴

Still persisting with the conspiracy theory during closing arguments, Buckley denounced Klan informants as paid government liars and FBI agents as brainwashed pawns programmed to pedal lies. Buckley even compared prosecutors to Nazis as he proclaimed that just as Adolph Hitler convinced Germans that their problems were caused by the Jews, the prosecutors used Bowers as a "as a sacrament to their political ambitions." In his closing argument, Helfrich seized on Buckley's foolish implication of Hitler and compared the Fuhrer to Bowers. He stressed that Hitler had ordered the genocide of Jews and asked caustically, "Did Hitler do it? No. His henchmen did it. Was Hitler responsible?" He reminded the jurors how Pitts had recalled that during the attack, he heard Dahmer's "voice in distress." Helfrich concluded, "A man's voice, ladies and gentlemen, is still in distress. It is in distress because Sam Bowers took his life and took his children away from him. His voice is still in distress because Sam Bowers is still

⁸⁴ Quoting *Mississippi v. Bowers*, transcript, vol. 2, 10. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 34-114, vol. 3, 36-86, 91-95, 106-135, 140-149 and vol. 4, 21-24, 29, 38-55, 66-88, 89-106. For more details about the Klan campaign, see Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 11-273.

walking the street.”⁸⁵

Some three hours later, as the Dahmer family watched from the balcony, the clerk read the jury’s verdict. Guilty. Ellie Dahmer shut her eyes as tears spilled down her cheeks. Spectators applauded the jurors as they left the courtroom. As Judge McKenzie sentenced Bowers to life in prison, the old Klansman showed no emotion. When the Dahmers emerged from the courtroom, Helfrich put his arm around Vernon, Jr. as Dennis addressed reporters: “Our father gave his life for a system that he believed in, even though that system wasn’t fair to him in his lifetime. We hope today’s verdict reflects the fact that we’re living in a new South and, more particularly, a new Mississippi.” Later that day, Vernon Jr., stood before reporters on the land of his childhood still scarred with the crime that stole his father; the Dahmers had never removed the concrete slab that remained after the Klansmen burned down their store or the Klansmen’s old burned out Ford abandoned in the woods. Vernon, Jr., told reporters that he was on his way to the cemetery to tell his father, “that justice finally came and he can begin to rest in peace.”⁸⁶

Back in the Forrest County jail, Pitts prayed that he, too, would know peace. He had once admired Bowers and thirsted for his approval. His devotion had led him to commit an unspeakable act only to have Bowers betray him. The guilt gnawed at his conscience, and his adulterous affairs, violent outbursts, and pain killers failed to numb his anguish. He never imagined that he could find redemption, but he dreamed of it. After

⁸⁵ Quoting *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998), transcript, vol. 5, 30-31; *Ibid.*, vol. 5, 21-31.

⁸⁶ Quoting Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, “Bowers Guilty,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 22, 1998. *Mississippi v. Bowers* (1998), vol. 5, 34; “Jury Reaches Verdict,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 22, 1998; Jerry Mitchell, “Bowers Guilty: Klansman Sentenced to Life,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 22, 1998; Mario Rossilli, “A Crime Not Forgotten,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, Saturday, August 22, 1998.

Bowers' trial, he met with the Dahmers, apologized for murdering their beloved Vernon, and pleaded for their forgiveness. The Dahmers not only accepted his apology and forgave him, but they fought for his pardon, which Governor Kirk Fordice granted. Despite his freedom from future prosecution, Pitts honored his promise to the Dahmers and prepared to testify in the Nix and Noble cases.⁸⁷

On September 19, the odyssey of the Nix case ended when he died of lung cancer. Helfrich and his team focused on convicting Noble. Sam Joe Owen, Noble's lawyer, proved a foreboding opponent because he possessed considerable legal skills and a six-member team to help him find holes in the prosecution's case. To the prosecution's chagrin, former District Attorney Glen White provided Owen with notes on the FBI files of the six-man theory. On June 10, 1999, when the trial began before a jury of 10 whites and two blacks, Owen claimed that Noble was never a Klansmen, and he sought to prove that the Forrest County Klan had planned the Dahmer killing rather than the Jones County Klan as the prosecution claimed. Six men, he insisted, attacked the Dahmers: Sessum, Moss, Martin, Charles Lowe, Cliff Lowe, and DeBoxtel. Pitts lied to the FBI for money and immunity for his participation in another Klan crime. Although Owen's use of the six-man theory was a clever defense, a host of FBI files that he left out invalidated it. First, during the 1960s investigation, Noble had revealed to agents that he was a Klansman, and he admitted to them that he participated in a dry-run in the Dahmer project. Second, reports implicated Noble in a similar 1960s Klan attack on the home of

⁸⁷ Jerry Mitchell, "Pitts' Life Sentence Suspended," *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 26, 1998. Vernon Dahmer, interview, by Patricia Boyett, October 2, 2001, MOHP recording; Pardon of Billy Roy Pitts, Governor Kirk Fordice, Executive Order 799, May 21, 1999, State of Mississippi, in Bowers, Sam et al. No. 6922, State v. Charles Noble Series, Helfrich Papers.

B. E. Murph. Third, statements by Sessum, Byrd, Martin, and Moss showed that Martin and Moss backed out of the execution phase of the Dahmer murder and that Pitts was one of the replacements. Finally, after Pitts confessed, he tried to persuade Charles Lowe to become an informant. If Pitts had lied, as Owen claimed, he would not deliver to agents a man who could contradict his story. However, Helfrich never had the chance to rebut Owen's claims because Judge McKenzie declared a mistrial after Pitts suggested that Klansmen had sent Carl Ford, a well known Klan attorney, to threaten him during Noble's trial.⁸⁸

Helfrich was certain he could convict Noble in the retrial. The state, however, never tried Noble again because Pitts fell ill with bladder cancer, forcing the prosecutors to agree to a *nolle prosequi*. Disappointed but resigned, Ellie Dahmer declared, "Charles Noble was guilty from Jan. 10, 1966 and he's still guilty today, and he will always be guilty. I give it up to God. If he can go meet his maker with that on his hands, then let

⁸⁸ "Cancer Claims Dahmer Slaying Defendant Nix," *Hattiesburg American*, September 20, 1998. Robert Helfrich, interviews, October 10 2001 and May 4, 2009; Jerry Mitchell, "Dahmer Case: Was Sharing Information Proper?" *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 15, 1998; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "Noble's Role in Dahmer Raid," *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 11, 1999; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "Last Trial in 1966 Murder by Klan to Begin," *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 7, 1999; Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "Noble Attorney Challenges Key Witness," *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 12, 1999, all in Noble File Vertical File, USM. Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, "10 whites, 2 Blacks to Hear Case Against Noble," *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 9, 1999; FBI Reports, February 16, 1966, Non Prosecutive Summary, March 9, 1966, 61-74, Martin FBI File, vol. 1, #157-433-60; SAC, Jackson to Director, March 4, 1966, DABURN File, vol. 23, 44-1512-1083; Frank B. Watz to SAC, Jackson, March 31, 1966, DeBoxtel File, vol. 1, #157-433-45; Benjamin F. Graves, to SAC, Jackson, January 18, 1968, Pitts FBI File, vol. 2, #157-5512-207; FBI Report, March 30, 1966, Noble FBI File 157-5385-17, *State v. Charles Noble: A-F*; FBI Report, February 22, 1966, Byrd FBI File, vol. 1 #157-505-122; FBI report January 12, 1966, DABURN File, vol., 9, #44-1512-294, all in Helfrich Papers. Billy Roy Pitts, testimony, *State of Mississippi v. Charles Noble* (1999), case no. 6785, 6793, transcript, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

God deal with him.”⁸⁹ As always in the Central Piney Woods, persistent injustices marred redemptive struggles, so, while Bowers suffered for his grave transgressions by spending the rest of his life in the state penitentiary, Noble escaped his reckoning.

Mississippi also remained tied to its haunted past when citizens rushed to the polls in May 2001 to vote on a referendum to decide whether or not to keep the state flag with its Confederate symbol. As the vote split almost perfectly across racial lines, the majority white population across the Central Piney Woods and the state ensured that the old flag remained. The national media and celebrities condemned the vote. Film director Spike Lee retorted to claims by the flag’s proponents that the Confederate symbol was representative of history: “well, so’s the swastika.” Many whites responded with outrage to the criticism. One white woman called it “the same old meddling by out-of-state people.” When a Laurel African American, Harvey Warren, tried to explain that when black Mississippians looked at the state flag they felt excluded, a white woman responded that since he hated Mississippi, he should leave. Decades earlier, one of Mississippi’s famous sons, William Faulkner, noted of the South, “the past is never dead. It is not even past.” Indeed, the past haunted the state as old Mississippi endured.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Quoting Nikki Davis Maute, “Noble Indictment Dismissed,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 23, 2001; *Mississippi v. Charles Noble*, Case 156/6785, January 10, 2002, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 5, 161.

⁹⁰ First quote, “State Should Adopt New Flag, Lee Says,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 10, 2006, Mississippi Symbols Vertical File, McCain, USM; second quote, Marion L. Williams, “Columnist Wrong to Criticize State,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 28, 2001; third quote, William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage, 1975), Act I, Scene III. A Report to the Governor and the Legislature by the Advisory on the Mississippi State Flag and Coat of Arms, Record Group 27: Ronnie Musgrove, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; “Newspapers Target State Over Flag,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 21, 2001; “State ‘Buried in the Past,’” *Hattiesburg American*, April 19, 2001; Harvey Warren, “Vote Illustrates Racial

Still, at the dawn of the new millennium, the hope for a new Mississippi flourished alongside white nostalgia for the Confederacy as blacks fought to take over the political landscape in Hattiesburg and Laurel. As the June election approached, Mayor Ed Morgan realized that he could not defeat challenger Johnny DuPree in a Democratic primary because blacks dominated the party. So he ran as a Republican. Morgan had the wealth and prestige DuPree lacked, and he raised \$221,000 to DuPree's \$60,000. Nevertheless, Reverend Fairley transformed the black community into a campaign machine. He mobilized his over 1,000 member congregation, which had recently moved into the enormous Main Street Baptist Church building in downtown Hattiesburg, into a campaign engine for DuPree. On Election Day, he implemented "Operation Blitz" in which black funeral home owners used their limousines, church leaders their buses, and volunteers their vehicles to "blitz" the black community in a get-out-the-vote drive. The caravans traveled across black neighborhoods to persuade blacks to vote and transport them to the nearest polling place. DuPree won by 700 votes. Rod Woullard replaced DuPree in his position as supervisor. The old CIAFC nucleus had acquired substantial power. In another surprise, community organizer and lawyer, Deborah Denard, defeated Councilman Holloway in the ward two Democratic primaries to become the first black woman on the Hattiesburg city council. Laurel also witnessed a shift in its political arena but on its council rather than in the mayor's office. As Jones and Gaddy had predicted, by 2001 blacks dominated the population in Laurel, and blacks won five of the seven city council seats. Incumbent Mayor Vincent, still popular among blacks, defeated her

Division," *Hattiesburg American*, April 22, 2001; "State Flag Vote Falls Along Racial Lines," *Hattiesburg American*, April 22, 2001; Editors, "This Could be State's Finest Hour," *Hattiesburg American*, April 17, 2001; Scott M. Larson, "Old Flag Still Flies," *Hattiesburg American*, April 18, 2001.

Republican challenger by securing 57 percent of the vote despite his appeals to racial prejudice over the annexation controversy.⁹¹

The Mississippi reckonings ushered forth great changes in the Central Piney Woods and the state, but Laurel and Hattiesburg still had far to travel on their road toward redemption. Hope for reconciliation breathed in the growing biracial alliances that had delivered Bowers to justice, attacked racism in the Laurel Fire Department, and elected DuPree and Vincent to the mayor's offices of Hattiesburg and Laurel respectively. Historian David Halberstam labeled cold Klan cases like that of Bowers and Beckwith, "a lot of little Nurembergs."⁹² The convictions of men like Bowers not only delivered justice to one family, but to the black community that loved him. It also furthered the process of unshackling Mississippi from its tragic past. Yet the mistrial of Nobles marred the Mississippi reckoning. The struggle for racial justice in the streets and in public safety departments also achieved ambivalent victories. Manuel Jones, Reverend Fairley, Fred Burns, and Rod Woullard had exposed persistent problems with police misconduct and Chief Bush and Chief Landers had responded by making important

⁹¹ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; Scott M. Larson, "Morgan Raises \$221,000 for Race," *Hattiesburg American*, May 31, 2001; Johnny DuPree, interview. For information on growth of Mt. Carmel, see, Nikki Davis Maute, "Second Foreclosure Surprises Church," *Hattiesburg American*, April 7, 2003; Mt. Carmel Baptist Church History, <http://www.mountcarmelministries.org/history.htm>. "DuPree Tops Morgan in Tight Mayoral Race," *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 2001; Scott M. Larson, "Denard Unseats Holloway," *Hattiesburg American*, May 17, 2001; Janet Braswell, "Denard Wins Ward 2 Race," *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 2001; James Jones, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 1, 2008; Shawn Wansley, "Annexation Hot Topic in Mayor's Race," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 3, 2001; Ryan Griffin, "Vincent Wins Another Term," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 6, 2001; Tom Doherty, "Laurel City Council Gets New Faces; Vincent Still Mayor," *Hattiesburg American*, June 6, 2001, Laurel Vertical File, McCain, USM.

⁹² "Remembering Reality," Intelligence Report, Issue 99, Summer 2000, SPLC, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=256&printable=1>.

strides in attacking police misconduct and racism in their department. However, these efforts remained incomplete, and the divergent perceptions of the state of racial justice prevented reconciliation and hindered peace. Although the Central Piney Woods had moved increasingly toward a more equitable society, it had also moved toward a separatist one as some whites reacted to the surge of black power by fleeing the cities, and some blacks used their power to dominate their towns and ignore white grievances. The reckonings delivered Laurel and Hattiesburg not to paradise, but to purgatory.

CHAPTER XIV:

PURGATORY: BATTLES OVER BIRACIAL RULE

On July 2, 2001, Hattiesburg inaugurated the city's first black mayor, Johnny DuPree, in the renovated Saenger Theater. The inauguration proved an historic event in a city that once barred blacks from its political halls and restricted them to balconies in the theatres. As DuPree stood before an overflowing, integrated audience, he acknowledged that some whites worried that he would focus his energies on black communities and neglect white concerns. He promised to work with the city council to represent the entire citizenry, and he pledged to become a "mayor who helps to heal wounds and stand watch while the city answers the call to renew." On the same day, Laurel blacks rejoiced as they witnessed the historic shift in their town's racial balance of power when five black and two white council members took their oaths of office. Most blacks also celebrated the inauguration of Mayor Susan Vincent for her third term because she had dedicated much of her attention to African American needs and interests. During her inaugural address, Vincent summoned her audience to honor Laurel's 120th birthday by emulating its heroic figures who dared to cross racial boundaries; for it was their audacity that had transformed the town from a train depot to a medical, commercial, and manufacturing hub. Vincent promised that as she and the city's leaders inherited the progressive spirit of their forebears, they, too, would "blaze new trails."¹

¹ First quote, "Inaugural Speech of Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny DuPree," *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 2001; second quote, Ryan Griffin, "Vincent Begins Third Term," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 3, 2001. Scott M. Larson, "DuPree's Past to Shape City's Future," *Hattiesburg American*, June 30, 2001; Nikki Davis Maute, "City Unity Top DuPree's Agenda," *Hattiesburg American*, July 3, 2001; "Vincent Wins Another Term," *Laurel Leader Call*, June 6, 2001.

For the next seven years, however, the promise of peaceful, biracial commonwealth eluded the Central Piney Woods as both Laurel and Hattiesburg became mired in community and political racial wars that stunted progress and hampered racial reconciliation. Since the post-civil rights era, the racial landscape had continued to evolve as whites with moderate and progressive racial mentalities increased while those with conservative mentalities decreased, and radical whites remained marginalized. Nevertheless, as the balance of racial power tipped toward blacks on the council in Laurel, and as a black man moved into the mayor's office in Hattiesburg, some whites feared that black power meant white powerlessness. Conservative and radical whites harbored racist beliefs that blacks were incapable of leading. Many whites across the racial mentality spectrum considered black leaders black supremacists who practiced the very racism that they had so often condemned. Few blacks exhibited radical racist mentalities, but the difficult racial battles of the civil rights and post-civil rights era had convinced many African Americans that they could never trust white leadership. Some black leaders responded to white criticism of the new black leadership that as whites had always ruled in the best interests of whites, it was time for blacks to rule in the best interest of blacks.

Still, the racial battles that ensued produced some positive results because, as blacks and whites shared power, they were forced eventually to consider each others' perspectives and interests to resolve disputes. Moreover, some stalwart integrationists fought to defy polarized encampments and mold their towns into functional biracial republics. In Laurel, the races settled for a *détente* as they accepted a system of divided political terrains. Although the political battles grew more hostile in Hattiesburg than in

Laurel, the concord was more optimistic as it produced a purge of the old guard that allowed for a tentative rebuilding toward a cooperative biracial government.

The root of the racial divide at the opening of the millennium was the failure of integration. From that root sprung interracial mistrust, intraracial solidarity, and racism. Nearly a century earlier, W. E. B. DuBois had argued, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” In the Central Piney Woods at the dawning of the twenty-first century, the color-line remained because the majority of whites and blacks had settled for a revised separate but equal doctrine, except this time separate was closer to equal. By 2001 blacks had achieved political power and civil rights, but integration had proceeded in a dysfunctional, hodgepodge manner. The workforce, hospitals, colleges, stores, and restaurants served as generally integrated spaces, while neighborhoods, public schools, churches, and social venues were mostly segregated. Blacks and whites generally lived in segregated neighborhoods and wards. As most whites were Republicans and most blacks were Democrats, they were divided too by political ideology. As few whites understood the devastating impact of Jim Crow, post-civil rights racial oppressions, and economic shifts on the black poor, the races disagreed vehemently over how to address crime and suffering in the inner cities. Finally, social segregation stunted biracial communication and understanding, and it cultivated distrust and strengthened intraracial solidarity that only furthered the racial breach. Thus, when the interests of white and black leaders clashed, the public generally perceived disputes as racial, even if they had not originated with racist intent.²

In Hattiesburg, the Manichean drama centered on the rise to power of Mayor

² Quoting W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 239.

DuPree and his inner circle of black men. Some whites perceived their victory as a black supremacist coup that threatened to bring ruination to the city. Conversely, many blacks perceived the white-dominated council as a bastion of white supremacy, and they accused the white council members of so virulently opposing the rise of a black man to the helm of city hall that they stymied his agenda for the revitalization and empowerment of the black community. The highly publicized Manichean narrative obscured the more muddled racial landscape. Twenty percent of whites had voted for DuPree, and they, along with many blacks, held out hope that DuPree would live up to his promises to serve as the mayor of the entire city. Neither DuPree's administration nor the white council members fit into the racial caricatures of the Manichean Mississippi play either. Initially, the white council members supported many of DuPree's directors and programs, but they grew concerned when he neglected to remove incompetent personnel. DuPree was a complex and complicated leader who dreamed of black uplift, but also of racial reconciliation. It took DuPree awhile to find the proper balance between unifying the city and empowering the black population. At first, DuPree and his inner circle decided to rule in the best interest of blacks because they had grown frustrated with white rule and distrusted that whites would ever fight for their interests. So, they fought to rebuild their town in their image. Whites, however, refused to retreat. Over the next seven years, racial battles wracked the Central Piney Woods.

After inaugural ceremonies, DuPree entered the mayor's office alone. In the quiet stillness of the emptied building, he settled into the leather chair in front of the impressive mahogany desk and looked around his grand office. Winning the mayor's seat he thought was "like catching an elephant . . . Where do you put him? What do you feed him?" He

had faced awesome responsibilities before; but he knew only a few people who had served as mayor, and he was the first black man to achieve that feat in Hattiesburg. He had to become the trailblazer without a mentor or a map to guide him. In the silence of the awesome room, he wondered aloud, “What in the world have I gotten myself into?” Within days of his inauguration, a 90-year-old black woman sat on the other side of his imposing desk, her eyes full of amazement as she congratulated him. Tears spilled down her wrinkled face. She had come through Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement and the many struggles thereafter of the Second Movement. She never imagined that she would live to witness a person of her race sitting in the mayor’s chair.³

In those early days of his tenure, DuPree also received visits from his detractors and threatening letters from anonymous enemies. One attorney informed him that he “had no business being the mayor.” Other citizens declared their intentions to leave Hattiesburg because surely the election of a black man would lead to the economic downfall of the city. Professor William Scarborough worried about Hattiesburg under Mayor DuPree as he argued that “there is nothing in the history of the world to encourage one to be optimistic where blacks are running things.” Some whites even wrote DuPree ugly letters, calling him a “mongrel,” and threatening to lynch him. Although the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan had decades ago lost their hold over Mississippi, local law

³ Johnny DuPree, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, recording, Mississippi Oral History Project, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter interviews from this collection that are not transcribed, cited as MOHP recording, interviews transcribed in the Oral History Digital Collection, cited as MOHP Digital, and printed transcripts cited by volume, MOHP. In subsequent citations, only the name of the interviewee will be cited unless the interviewee was interviewed by multiple interviewers or by the same interviewer on multiple occasions in which case the name of the interviewer and/or the date will also be cited].

enforcement took these threats seriously. The Hattiesburg Police Department sent a regular detail to guard DuPree's home, and the police and the sheriff's office continued to monitor known Klansmen. In the early years of the millennium, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan had chapters in Hattiesburg, Petal, and Laurel. Petal also had a Christian White Knights Church of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴

A few months after the inauguration of Mayor DuPree, Jimmie Maxie, the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights, hosted a Klan rally at his rustic home in rural Forrest County. He hoped that the rally would unite the white supremacist groups from across the nation and strengthen their force. Throughout the rally, leaders railed against the federal government, which they referred to as America's Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). They claimed that in the 1960s, Zionists and communists had used blacks in the Movement to destroy the "white nation" through integration and miscegenation and to reverse racial power. A Louisiana Klan leader, Eric Adams, declared, "America was founded for the white race by the white race and any effort to transfer control to the niggers is an obvious violation of our constitution and divine will." Others declared that the 9/11 attacks revealed that the time had neared to attack ZOG's "New World Order." White hands cut the air in Hitler salutes, as the Klansmen shouted,

⁴ First and third quotes, Johnny DuPree, interview; second quote, William K. Scarborough, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), April 25, 2007, MOHP recording. Larry Dykes, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 24, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 251, MOHP; South Mississippi Klan Rally, October 27, 2001, video-tape, MOHP, [hereinafter cited as Klan Rally, MOHP]. For the Oklahoma bombing and Southern Poverty Law Center's investigation, see Morris Dees with James Corcoran, *Gathering Storm: America's Militia Threat* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 179-197. For white supremacist groups in Mississippi, see Intelligent Project: Tracking the Threat of Hate, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/history.jsp>; "Active U. S. Hate Groups in 2007" Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp> Mississippi Hate Groups, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/hatewatch/fortherecord.jsp>.

“White Power! White Revolution!” When darkness fell, some dozen men donned their Klan regalia and circled a large burning cross. The laughter of their children playing nearby echoed across the clearing in the woods as the Klansmen halted, faced the roaring fire, and pledged to fight: “For My God, For My Country, For My Klan.”⁵

The white supremacists’ bravado notwithstanding, the successes of the Movement and the federal intervention since the 1960s had rendered their extremist ideology intolerable, their violent crimes punishable, and had forced Maxie and his pathetic band of followers to huddle in the shadows on the far edges of society. Their most powerful leader, Sam Bowers, languished in prison for the murder he had ordered over 30 years ago. The dearth of people at the meeting and its haphazard organization further revealed how far into the marginal abyss the Klan had fallen. Around 40 men, some accompanied by their wives and young children, attended the meeting, and most of them appeared bored. Maxie, a diminutive, balding man with spectacles, lacked an imposing posture or a magnetic personality. He failed to captivate the crowd with his directionless opening speech, though he managed to inspire an occasional Hitler salute and a “white power” bark. The rally, despite passionate calls for an uprising, assumed a general tone of pessimism. According to Forrest County Sheriff Billy McGee and Jones County Sheriff Larry Dykes, Klansmen lived on the fringes of society. Still, Timothy McVeigh, the mastermind and executor of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and the 9/11 terrorists had taught America the folly of underestimating the power of any terror cell.⁶

⁵ Quoting Klan Rally, MOHP; Dees, *Gathering Storm*, 9.

⁶ Quoting Klan Rally, MOHP; Sheriff Larry Dykes, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 24, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 251, MOHP; Billy McGee, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, MOHP recording. For SPLC’s

Still, Mayor DuPree refused to live in fear. Soon after his election, he released the police detail guarding his home. And despite the threats from white supremacists, DuPree remained determined to honor the struggles suffered by those activists who had laid the foundations for his rise to power by fulfilling his pledges to revamp the police department, to revitalize downtown, and to improve the infrastructure and education in the long neglected black neighborhoods. In the months and years that followed, he defended his focus on black communities. Surely, if the city could at long last focus its efforts on rebuilding deteriorating infrastructure, removing blight in devastated neighborhoods, and uplifting the impoverished black community, it could begin to heal the broken black *undercaste*. Such developments would also help the entire city for as DuPree noted, “often what’s good for the city of Hattiesburg is what’s best for the least of us.” By rebuilding poor black Hattiesburg, he could improve the vitality of the whole city.⁷

Mayor DuPree received biracial praise when he acquired municipal and federal funds equaling \$10 million to restore the charming Italian Renaissance style to the train depot in downtown that served as a transportation hub for trains, buses, and taxis, and housed a grand ballroom for gala events. Citizens also supported the Board of Supervisors when they funded \$4 million in renovations to the Forrest County

investigation of hate groups, see Intelligent Project: Tracking the Threat of Hate, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/history.jsp>; “Active U. S. Hate Groups in 2007” Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp>; hate crimes, under intelligent report, and put in Mississippi in the selection box, on the SPLC website: <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/hatewatch/fortherecord.jsp>. Record of Sam Bowers, MDOC #R5597, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

⁷ Johnny DuPree, interview.

Courthouse and the Masonic Temple. However, blacks faced white opposition when they sought to extend city-funded renovations to nearby decaying black neighborhoods. To fulfill his promises of black uplift, DuPree designed Progress Hattiesburg, which would use bonds collected from sales taxes on restaurants and hotels to fund infrastructure and sewage improvements in black communities. White council members persistently opposed the project, and DuPree spent years trying to pass it.⁸

Black council members also faced white obstruction when they sought to fund projects in black neighborhoods. In April 2003, black Councilwoman Deborah Denard proposed that the council include in the city's budget agenda a project to build a community center in East Jerusalem, a neighborhood that had suffered from a "history of neglect." When the white council members voted against it, she reintroduced the project that winter after a proprietor offered to donate land for the center. Still, the three white council members voted against the project because it would cost the city \$150,000 to build. Carter Carroll, the white president of the city council, proclaimed that he found the leadership of DuPree and Denard, who would oversee the project, wanting. The dismissal of the project devastated many residents of East Jerusalem who considered themselves a

⁸ Kevin Walters, "City's Aging Downtown Faces New Challenges," *Hattiesburg American*, December 28, 2001; Reuben Mees, "Hard to Believe it's a Train Depot," *Hattiesburg American*, March 17, 2007; Lindy Sholes, "Forrest OKs Bond Issue to Renovate New Court," *Hattiesburg American*, November 19, 2004; Rachel Leifer, "Architect Leaves Mark on Hattiesburg," *Hattiesburg American*, November 6, 2006, all in Hattiesburg, MS-Revitalization Vertical File, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as McCain, USM]. Urban Design Mississippi Research and Development Center, "Executive Summary of Recommendations for Downtown Redevelopment, Hattiesburg, Mississippi," October 1981, Hattiesburg Municipal Records, McCain, USM, [hereinafter cited as HMR]; Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, <http://www.hahsmuseum.org/newsletter.html#>. For Progress Hattiesburg, see, City Council Meeting, February 21, 2006, *City of Hattiesburg, City Hall Minute Book*, vol. 2006-1, 431, Office of City Clerk, City Hall, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Hattiesburg City Hall Minutes*].

people forgotten by the city and its many renovation projects of downtown Hattiesburg just seven blocks away. Former Freedom Summer student Cheryl Outlaw, who had been raised in the community and worked on the project, accused the white council members of opposing the center because their business contacts planned to buy out the entire riverfront and transform it into a commercialized area. She considered Carroll, whom she described as a “dirty man,” the ringleader of the white opposition. Outlaw, Mayor DuPree, Denard, and the Concerned Citizens of East Jerusalem fought for the community center, and in February 2005, the white council members finally approved the project.⁹

These eventual successes fell in the shadow of racial divisiveness. Some racial breaches emerged outside of the city government. Reverend Kenneth Fairley enraged many residents in the summer 2004 when he opposed a bond for the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) that proposed a one percent tax increase on hotel rooms and restaurant dining to support the athletic program. Since 1973 Fairley had implored city leaders to use bonds to rebuild infrastructure in long neglected black communities. Instead, city leaders passed bonds to renovate the zoo and the Saenger Theatre, and to build a convention center, while always promising that the next bond would include funding for projects in the black community. In 2004 a group of whites who designed the

⁹ First quote, City Council Meeting, April 8, 2003, *Hattiesburg City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2003-2, 514; second quote, Cheryl Outlaw, interview by Patricia Boyett, October 2, 2008, MOHP recording. City Council Meeting, December 16, 2003, *Hattiesburg City Hall Minutes* vol. 2003-7, 14; “Demise of Project Inexcusable,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 18, 2003; Reuben Mees, “Mobile Street Revitalization,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 8, 2006; Nikki Davis Maute, “City Council Backs E. Jerusalem Center,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 23, 2005; Nikki Davis Maute, “Action in E. Jerusalem,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 22, 2005. Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 8, 2009, MOHP recording. Deborah Denard married during her political career and changed her name to Deborah Dennard-Delgado. For the sake of clarity, she is referred to as Denard in the body of the work, but Deborah Denard-Delgado in the oral history citation.

USM bond proposal contacted Fairley and asked him to serve on the committee. They hoped he would help deliver the black vote because he was a proud graduate of the university, and he attended regularly its athletic and entertainment events. They were shocked when Fairley chastised them for once again only approaching the black community leaders once they had proposed a project rather than including them in the development phase. Frustrated, he informed them: “It’s like we don’t exist.” When the men tried to explain that they could not include black community projects on this bond, Fairley responded in kind as he retorted, “no, not now, to your project.”¹⁰

Fairley turned his phrase “No Not Now” into a campaign slogan to vote the bond down, and he used the Registration, Education, Participation method to mobilize the black community against it. During mass meetings and through the media, Fairley argued that surely the needs of impoverished black neighborhoods where sidewalks, lighting, and streets were in desperate need of repair were more important than financing the USM athletic program. Fairley not only confronted opposition from whites, but from African American proponents of the bond including Councilwoman Denard, Councilman Henry Naylor, and from community activist Raylawni Branch, who had desegregated USM in 1965. Mayor DuPree neglected to take a stand on the referendum. The bond failed. Because the townspeople considered the mayor’s silence on the bond as reflective of his support of Fairley’s campaign, many residents blamed him. When DuPree and Fairley

¹⁰ First quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009, MOHP recording; all other quotes, Kenneth Fairley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 8, 2009, MOHP recording. Kevin Walters, “Fairly Wary of USM Tax Plan,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 2004; Hutch Breithaupt, “Where Would We be Without USM?” *Hattiesburg American*, November 4, 2004; Chris Preston, “What is Fairley’s Chief Concern?” *Hattiesburg American*, October 13, 2004; Reuben Mees, “Things Get Ugly Between Council, DuPree,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 2006; “Board Issues Endorsement in City Races,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 2005.

attended athletic events at USM, and the announcers welcomed the mayor, spectators booed and waved signs declaring, "Fairley sucks." Still, Fairley never regretted his actions because it sent the message that the next bond would include black needs or fail.¹¹ Although the vitriol over funding persisted, the greatest racial divides emerged over DuPree's appointments of African Americans to powerful city positions.

Immediately after DuPree took office, he tore apart the nearly all-white city governing system and restructured the racial power hierarchy when he appointed blacks as directors of most departments. Councilman Carroll conceded that until DuPree came to power, Hattiesburg was a white-run town that often neglected black interests, and he considered it fair that the mayor would bring greater balance to the racial makeup of all of the city departments. Still, he had hoped that DuPree would proceed in a gradual manner, replacing whites with blacks through the normal "attrition" of retirement. From the perspective of most blacks, however, gradualism had long been used to prevent black inclusion. As Councilwoman Denard noted, her constituents were tired of waiting. The white council members approved many of these appointments, but they clashed with DuPree and the black council members over others, and soon they became mired in a battle for control of the city.¹²

¹¹ Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; Reuben Mees, "Things Get Ugly," *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 2006; "Board Issues Endorsement," *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 2005; Kevin Walters, "Fairly Wary of USM Tax Plan," *Hattiesburg American*, July 10, 2004; Hutch Breithaupt, "Where Would We be Without USM?" *Hattiesburg American*, November 4, 2004; Chris Preston, "What is Fairley's Chief Concern?" *Hattiesburg American*, October 13, 2004.

¹² Carter Carroll, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 8, 2009, MOHP recording.

The first major battle emerged over the racial composition of the school board. DuPree, like most African Americans, considered education one of the most important battlegrounds of the civil rights struggle. For DuPree, it was also personal as he had been among the first class to integrate Hattiesburg High school. He also treasured education, and while serving as mayor he earned a Ph.D in political science at USM. For nearly two decades many black leaders had argued that since blacks dominated the student bodies in the Hattiesburg school district, blacks should dominate the school board. In March 2002, DuPree appointed African American Reverend Carlos Wilson to fill the vacancy on the board; if confirmed, the board's racial balance of power would tip toward blacks for the first time in the city's history. After the council members met with Wilson, black council members Denard and Naylor voted to confirm him, but white members Carroll, Red Bailey, and Betsy Rowell rejected the appointment. Enraged, Reverend Fairley and Forrest County NAACP President Clarence Magee denounced the white bloc vote as a racist maneuver to prevent black control over the school system. On April 16, Mayor DuPree, the NAACP leaders, and a host of black citizens attended a city council meeting to voice their protest of the council's vote. Magee presented to the council a petition containing 696 signatures in support of Wilson. Not everyone in the black community supported Wilson, as some blacks argued that DuPree could find a more qualified candidate with greater ties to the community. The controversy simmered when DuPree appointed, and the council unanimously approved, African American Clyde Bryant. To ensure that blacks would dominate the school board for a long time, DuPree filled the next board vacancy with an African American, so blacks held four of the five seats.¹³

¹³ Amber Jo Bethel, "Council Rejects Wilson," *Hattiesburg American*, March 6,

Still, racial tensions over appointments continued, particularly as DuPree sought to diversify the public face of Hattiesburg. In early 2003, DuPree appointed Bonnie Warren, a white woman, and James Ratliff, a black man, to the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission. Rowell requested the tabling of Ratliff's nomination until she had the chance to meet with him. When Denard requested that the council table Warren's appointment until she interviewed her, the council ignored her request. Again, the council split as the three white members voted to appoint Warren and table the Ratliff nomination, and the two black members voted against both motions. Angered by the vote, Denard scowled, "discrimination, discrimination," and Mayor DuPree criticized the white council members for their disparity in treatment of his nominees. Rowell defended her right to interview Ratliff for such an important position, and she emphasized that DuPree had snubbed her requests for more information about him. Although two weeks later the three white council members voted in favor of ratifying Ratliff's appointment, they defended their right to interview candidates. Of course, they had denied that very right to

2002. For racial composition of board under Mayor Ed Morgan, see Scott M. Larson, "Group Critical of Mayor's Choice," *Hattiesburg American*, June 24, 2000, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. Scott M. Larson, "NAACP Starts Petition," *Hattiesburg American*, April 8, 2002; Scott M. Larson, "Mayor, Petition Push for Wilson on School Board," *Hattiesburg American*, April 17, 2002; Scott M. Larson, "Wilson Speaks at NAACP Event," *Hattiesburg American*, April 28, 2002; Kenneth Fairley, interview; Johnny DuPree, interview; City Council Meeting, April 16, 2002, *Hattiesburg City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2002-3, 318-351 and May 21, 2002, 311, vol. 2002-4; "Superintendent's Office" and "Meet Our School Board," on Hattiesburg Public School District website: <http://www.hpsd.k12.ms.us/portal/Home/tabid/52/Default.aspx>; Enrollment by Grade/Race/Gender 2007/2008, Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System, Office of Research and Statistics, Mississippi Department of Education <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/ORS/DAADF.htm> (both accessed April 17, 2008).

Denard when she requested an interview with Warren.¹⁴

The conflicts on the council stemmed from differing racial perspectives and divides, but also from the clashing of personalities. Unlike the black council members of the past who had finessed compromises toward long term goals, Denard fought aggressively for immediate changes. She realized that the white council members had come of age in a social world that greatly differed from the society on the black side of the color line that had raised her and Councilman Naylor. So during meetings Denard tried to force whites to take her views into consideration and to imagine life from the black side of Hattiesburg. Carroll, however, perceived her style as offensive, petulant, and racist. He accused her of playing the “race card” to force the white members to concede to her demands, and he argued that “just like a child . . . [she] would throw a temper tantrum” when she lost a battle. Most blacks perceived the conflict in reverse. They considered Carroll arrogant, and they perceived his statements as reflective of a racist attitude. Denard viewed white male criticism of her style indicative of their discomfort with strong black women. Carroll was shocked by these accusations. Although he and Denard clashed, he was fond of Councilman Naylor, and he had worked well with previous black council members. All the whites on the council were more comfortable with Naylor than with Denard. He fought for his constituents, but in a less aggressive manner. Still, he too clashed with whites when they opposed DuPree’s

¹⁴ Quoting Scott M. Larson, “DuPree Criticizes Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 8, 2003; City Council Meeting, January 7, 2003, *Hattiesburg, City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2003-1, 53,168; Rich Campbell and staff, “Council Must Confront the ‘Race’ Issue,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 13, 2003; Johnny DuPree, “Let’s Rise Above Our Differences,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 19, 2003.

appointments.¹⁵

The most controversial racial divisions in the city under Mayor DuPree centered on the performances of Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Beverly Commodore and Chief of Police David Wynn, both of whom were African Americans. Although the city council had confirmed both appointments unanimously, the white council members soon regretted their decision. As CAO, Commodore served as the liaison between the mayor and all of the directors and chiefs of city departments. Carroll characterized Commodore as a racist, and he claimed that she forced white employees to quit their jobs by making their working hours insufferable so she could replace them with black personnel. Contrarily, Denard considered Commodore Hattiesburg's finest employee. According to Denard, Commodore refused to accept incompetence in the city's directors, particularly the failings of Public Service Director Bennie Sellers, who refused to complete many of the infrastructure projects initiated by Mayor DuPree. When Commodore pressured Sellers to complete his work, he complained to the white council members, and they began a campaign to remove her.¹⁶ The controversy surrounding Commodore grew ugly, but not nearly as hostile as the racial clashes over Chief Wynn.

The appointment of a black police chief by a black mayor in a town long divided over accusations of race-based police brutality and haunted by racial injustices threatened

¹⁵ Quoting Carter Carroll, interview. Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Reuben Mees, "Things Get Ugly Between Council, DuPree," February 22, 2006; Reuben Mees, "Inflammatory Comments Spark Call for Apology," *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 2006. Cheryl Outlaw, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Henry Naylor, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 9, 2009, MOHP recording.

¹⁶ Carter Carroll, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview. For more information on Sellers and Commodore, see The City of Hattiesburg, *City of Hattiesburg 2006 Annual Report: A Time To Rebuild*, 8-9, 14-15, City of Hattiesburg website: <http://www.hattiesburgms.com/html/download.html>.

to cause strife from the beginning. When DuPree dismissed Chief Charlie Sims, rumblings of discontent began. DuPree considered the police chief his paramount appointment. He sought a chief who possessed the gumption to remake the HPD into a community policing organization by terminating racial profiling and removing racist and overly aggressive officers from the force. DuPree thought he had found that perfect candidate in his longtime friend, David Wynn. The appointment of Wynn achieved two historical feats for the HPD: Wynn was the first black police chief and the first chief hired outside the HPD. Initially, many whites considered Wynn an excellent candidate. Raised in Starkville, Mississippi, Wynn had served in the Starkville Police Department for two years and on the Highway Safety Patrol for 20 years, retiring as a major. He received his bachelor's degree in criminal justice from USM, graduated from the FBI's National Academy, and reached the rank of colonel in the National Guard. At the time of his appointment, he was director of training at the Regional Counter Drug Training Academy in Meridian. The council confirmed Wynn unanimously.¹⁷

Immediately, Chief Wynn radically transformed the culture and operation of the HPD. He terminated the practice of profiling and informed his officers that he would not tolerate any sort of police misconduct, particularly excessive force. Previous chiefs had

¹⁷ Lea Crager, "Chief Wynn Approaches Challenges with Big Heart," *Hattiesburg American*, August 25, 2002; Scott M. Larson, "Sims to Step Down as Police Chief," *Hattiesburg American*, June 26, 2001, both in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM; Carter Carroll, interview; Johnny DuPree, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Charlie Sims, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2009, MOHP recording; Press Release, "TSA Names David Wynn Federal Security Director for Jackson-Evers International Airport," February 20, 2007, website: http://www.tsa.gov/press/releases/2007/press_release_02202007b.shtm (September 2009); Mississippi Department of Public Safety News/Press Release, "Veteran Patrolman, New Counterdrug Training Director," January 9, 2001, <http://www.dps.state.ms.us/dps/dps.nsf/detailnews/2DB94D838D9AA17686256A3E0051785D?OpenDocument> (accessed September 2009).

always treated the department like a large family unit, and they assumed the position of the gentle, but firm patriarch. According to Wynn's detractors, he ran the HPD like a military brigade, and he functioned as the general who expected unquestioned obedience from all of his officers. When officers violated his rules, they faced quick disciplinary action ranging from loss of pay, to demotion, to firing. Many white officers considered Wynn a black supremacist who discriminated against them. Some left the force; others complained to white council members that Wynn's military leadership style, his racist attitude, and his radical policies were destroying the HPD. The council also received complaints from citizens as they watched with dread the rise of crime under Wynn.

The council members lacked the power to remove Wynn until the mayoral elections in 2005 because once they had confirmed his appointment, only the mayor could fire him. When the mayor refused to consider removing Wynn, the white council members criticized the chief in council meetings and in the media. They claimed that Wynn lacked the leadership skills to run a municipal department, and they stressed that because he had terminated behavioral profiling as a policing technique, crime increased. The claim was not entirely accurate. According to Hattiesburg's crime statistics for January through October 2002, the city experienced an 11 percent decrease in murder and rape; however, they also showed a 103.5 increase in robberies, a 20 percent increase in burglaries, and a 29 percent increase in illegal narcotics crimes.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lea Crager, "Chief Wynn Approaches Challenges with Big Heart," *Hattiesburg American*, August 25, 2002; Nikki Davis Maute, "Chief Criticized for Crime Increases," *Hattiesburg American*, December 3, 2002, both in Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM. Carter Carroll, interview; Wayne Landers, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2009, MOHP recording; Nikki Davis Maute, "Wynn Defends Crime-fighting Efforts of HPD," *Hattiesburg American*, December 5, 2002; Johnny DuPree, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009.

In April 2003, some citizens grew even more concerned about Wynn when the *Hattiesburg American* reported that over a month earlier the chief had removed more than 60 pounds of marijuana worth \$100,000 from Fairley's Life Center at Mount Carmel Baptist Church. No one was arrested in the incident. According to Fairley, a parishioner had found the narcotics in her home and requested his help. He suggested that she bring it to the center, and he would turn it over to the HPD. Fairley refused to divulge the identity of his parishioner to police and claimed it was his ecclesiastic privilege. DuPree and Chief Wynn only informed the public about the incident when reporters unearthed the story from leaks and started asking questions. Citizens and the *Hattiesburg American* denounced Wynn and DuPree for their handling of the episode. Although the Drug Enforcement Agency later investigated the incident, no one was indicted for the crime.¹⁹

Black city and community leaders rushed to Wynn's defense. NAACP leader Clarence Magee denounced the *Hattiesburg American* for engaging in a "feeding frenzy" against Fairley, DuPree, and Wynn when it was Fairley's legal right to protect his parishioner. He accused Wynn's detractors of attempting to "assassinate" the chief's character, and he speculated that white officers had left the HPD because white men despised taking orders from black men. Denard and Naylor defended Wynn's work in reducing police brutality. Fairley, Fred Burns, Douglass Baker and Rod Woullard praised Wynn for hiring and promoting several black officers and for reducing police misconduct in black neighborhoods by demoting and firing officers who violated his policies. The divergent perspectives between the white and black power players led steadily toward a

¹⁹ Lea Crager and Nikki Davis Maute, "Minister Won't Identify Women to Drug Agents," *Hattiesburg American*, April 2, 2003; Rich Campbell, "Investigation Appears to be Warranted," *Hattiesburg American*, April 10, 2003; Rich Campbell, "Wynn Should Have Reported Drug Incident," *Hattiesburg American*, April 3, 2003.

racially divided 2005 election when Councilwoman Rowell ran against DuPree for mayor.²⁰

Rowell campaigned on a platform to fire Chief Wynn and to remove other directors whom she considered inefficient. Nathan Jordan, a former NAACP president, shocked the city when he supported Rowell and produced advertisements that attacked DuPree. One flyer featured Fairley's head over Mayor DuPree with a caption below asking: "who really runs city hall?" Radio advertisements claimed that DuPree had granted Fairley special privileges and suggested that Chief Wynn and DuPree had shielded Fairley's criminal activities. One spot noted that after Chief Sims arrested Fairley in 1997 because he ignored police commands to leave a crime scene, DuPree bailed him out of jail. Another one reminded the citizens that "DuPree's police chief" had retrieved 60 pounds of marijuana from Fairley's church, but police neglected to charge anyone with the crime. DuPree fought back. He maintained that he, not Fairley, ran city hall, and he pointed out that although they debated spiritual and political philosophies, "he is the pastor of that church," and DuPree respected his ecclesiastical authority just as "I am the mayor of Hattiesburg," and Fairley respected his secular authority. DuPree would never abandon his childhood friend. When people warned him that their friendship would lead to his political ruin, DuPree responded, "I'd rather lose with a friend than win

²⁰ First quote, Clarence Magee, "Feeding Frenzy Angers NAACP," *Hattiesburg American*, April 15, 2003; second quote, City Council Meeting, December 17, 2005, *Hattiesburg City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2002-8, 97, *Ibid.*, 95-96. Clarence Magee, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 25, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2009; Fred Burns, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2009, all MOHP recordings. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Nikki Davis Maute, "Chief Criticized for Crime Increases," *Hattiesburg American*, December 3, 2002; Nikki Davis Maute, "Wynn Defends Crime-fighting Efforts," *Hattiesburg American*, December 5, 2002.

with enemies.”²¹

DuPree’s friendship with Fairley may have turned some voters away, but it also cemented others’ loyalty. As Fairley later noted, Jordan’s negative advertising “backfired” because the black “bourgeois love Johnny, but the [black] grassroots have a love for me.” DuPree also continued to enjoy support from traditional institutions including the *Hattiesburg American* Editorial Board whose members endorsed DuPree. They highlighted his many successes, including the renovations in downtown Hattiesburg and the acquisition of funding to secure the city after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Although they conceded that DuPree had flaws, particularly his failure to support the USM bond and to address problems with Chief Wynn, they insisted that his accomplishments and his vision for the city outweighed his failings, and they encouraged voters to reelect him. DuPree easily defeated Rowell when he won 60 percent of the vote.²²

Immediately after his reelection, DuPree reinvigorated the racial divide by reappointing Wynn and Commodore. When the white council members expressed their opposition publicly to both appointments, Mayor Dupree refused to submit any of his directors before the council for approval. Backed by the Forrest County NAACP, Dupree

²¹ First quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview May 13, 2009; second quote, Nikki Davis Maute, “Add Attacks DuPree-Fairley Link,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 2, 2005; all other quotes, Johnny DuPree, interview. “Negative Ads, GOP Infighting Marred Race,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 8, 2005; Nikki Davis Maute, “Attacks Takes Focus Off Issues in Mayor’s Race,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 5, 2005; Amanda Eady, “Rowell Would Review Department Heads,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 26, 2005; “Why Were Changes Made Now?” *Hattiesburg American*, June 23, 2005; David Ware, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 12, 2009, MOHP recording.

²² Quoting Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. “Negative Ads, GOP Infighting Marred Race,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 8, 2005; “DuPree, Senne Top Mayoral Candidates,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 24, 2005; “Board Issues Endorsement,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 29, 2005.

declared his decisive victory over Rowell a mandate to retain Wynn and Commodore. When Chief Wynn demoted many of the officers who had supported Rowell, DuPree's critics lambasted the demotions as political retaliation. The flight of officers from the HPD became a mass exodus. In February 2006, blacks accused the white council members of responding with their own political payback when Mayor DuPree sought council approval for his pet project, Progress Hattiesburg. During the council meeting, the steering committee outlined the project, which would use a special sales tax to rebuild infrastructure in black neighborhoods. Black residents attending the meeting voiced their enthusiasm for the project. Carroll abruptly ended the session when he refused DuPree's request for the floor, and Carroll, Bailey, and new white Councilman Kim Bradley—who represented ward one vacated by Rowell—voted down the project. Then, Carroll turned toward Dupree and remarked snidely, “Mayor, No Not Now,” in caustic reference to Fairley's campaign against the USM bond referendum. Furious, Fairley organized a meeting at city hall attended by 200 people to protest Carroll's remarks. Black resident Frankie Benton, Sr. ruined the protest and horrified the crowd when he proclaimed that if he were mayor he would have the police chief “kill Carter Carroll.” Both Carroll and Benton later apologized, but neither public declarations of remorse quelled racial hostilities.²³

²³ First quote, Reuben Mees, “Things Get Ugly,” February 22, 2006; second quote, Reuben Mees, “Inflammatory Comments Spark Call for Apology,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 2, 2006. City Council Meeting, February 21, 2006, *Hattiesburg, City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2006-1, 431; “Councilman Apologizes to Mayor,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 2006; “Why Were Changes Made Now?” *Hattiesburg American*, June 23, 2005; Nikki Davis Maute, “Wynn Defends Crime-fighting Efforts of HPD,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 5, 2002, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM. “3 Councilmen File Suit Against Mayor,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 31, 2006;

In May, racial tensions were further strained when progressive whites joined blacks to seek retributive justice for Clyde Kennard, the black activist who had been framed and imprisoned for theft in the 1960s after trying to desegregate USM. The struggle began in Chicago where Kennard had spent most of his teenage years. In 2005, students from Adlai Stevenson High School National History Day Club in Chicago acquired the help of the Northwestern University School of Law Center On Wrongful Convictions, the Kennard family, Raylawni Branch, and *The Clarion Ledger* journalist Jerry Mitchell to seek a posthumous exoneration for Kennard. Finally, on January 27, 2006, Johnny L. Roberts, the state's witness against Kennard in the 1960s, revealed that he had lied at the trial when he testified that Kennard had asked him to steal chicken feed for him.²⁴

The struggle to exonerate Kennard spread to the Hattiesburg community when President of the Southern Miss Afro-American Student Organization LaKeisha Bryant circulated a petition demanding that the state clear Kennard, an effort the *Hattiesburg American* called on residents to support. More than 1,500 people signed the petition. The Center on Wrongful Convictions, civil rights leaders, politicians, scholars, litigators, and newspaper editors including the editors of the *Hattiesburg American* implored Governor Haley Barbour to pardon Kennard. Dave Mattison, Jr., a former white resident of

Reuben Mees, "DuPree, Council Continue Standoff," *Hattiesburg American*, May 3, 2006, both in Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM.

²⁴ "Clyde Kennard Timeline," Clyde Kennard website: <http://www6.district125.k12.il.us/~bbradfor/clydekennardreso.html> (accessed October 2006); Affidavit of Johnny Lee Roberts, January 27, 2006, "Proof Clyde Kennard's Innocence," Clyde Kennard website: <http://www6.district125.k12.il.us/~bbradfor/clydekennardreso.html> (accessed October 2006).

Hattiesburg whose family had been close with the Kennards, stressed in a letter that Hattiesburg citizens were well aware that powerful people had framed Kennard to prevent him from desegregating USM. Mattison implored the governor to act so he might heal the wounds born of guilt suffered by so many families like his own, who in the sixties failed to protest the racial crime. Barbour refused. In response to the mounting pressure, the Mississippi Senate unanimously passed a resolution honoring Kennard, and the governor issued a proclamation declaring March 30 Clyde Kennard Day. However, Kennard supporters expected justice, not a symbolic gesture. Finally, Judge Charles Pickering, a prominent figure in Jones County who believed Kennard innocent, acquired signatures on a petition from 15 prominent Mississippians, including Ellie Dahmer, Vernon Dahmer, Jr., Aubrey Lucas, W. O. Dillard, and former Governor William Winter, requesting that the Forrest County Circuit Court overturn Kennard's conviction. Robert Helfrich, who had successfully prosecuted Sam Bowers in 1998 for the 1966 murder of Vernon Dahmer, had recently been elected judge of the circuit court. On May 17, 2006, the signatories gathered in the courtroom as Judge Helfrich ruled that Kennard was convicted to prevent him from desegregating USM, and he declared Kennard innocent of the crimes for which he had been wrongly convicted.²⁵

²⁵ *State of Mississippi v. Clyde Kennard* (2006), case no. 5833, case file, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Mississippi v. Kennard* (2006)]; Robert Helfrich, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 4, 2009, MOHP recording; "Kennard Ruling is Step Forward for Mississippi," *Hattiesburg American*, May 18, 2006. Dave Mattison, to Governor Haley Barbour, May 5, 2006, Letters of Support, Clyde Kennard; and various letters of support; Dan Gibbard, "Students Worked to Clear Man's Name," *The Chicago Tribune*, May 18, 2006; Dan Gibbard, "Judge Tosses Out 1960 Conviction," *The Chicago Tribune*, May 18, 2006, all in Kennard website: <http://www6.district125.k12.il.us/~bbradfor/clydekennardreso.html> (accessed October 2006). "Speak Out to Clear Kennard," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2006; Rachel Leifer and Reuben Mees, "Family, Friends Rejoice in Exoneration," *Hattiesburg*

However, Richard Barrett, the leader of the Nationalist Movement in Hinds County, in conjunction with several local whites, appealed the decision. Barrett requested that Judge Helfrich vacate the judgment on the grounds that the court lacked jurisdiction because the state no longer had custody of Kennard; the Mississippi Supreme Court had previously ruled against the exoneration; the statute of limitations on the crime had expired; and the judge lacked sufficient evidence to overturn the conviction. Barrett argued that modern integrationists who supported exoneration “argue a somewhat tortured version of the ‘king can do no wrong,’ only that an integrationist can do no wrong.” That September, Judge Helfrich granted Pickering’s motion to deny the appeal on the grounds that the plaintiffs lacked the legal standing to intervene. Barrett appealed, but in August 2007, the Mississippi Supreme Court upheld Helfrich’s ruling. The exoneration, though significant, only partially atoned for the past injustice because it failed to name the guilty parties who had conspired to frame Kennard. The lack of full disclosure in Mississippi’s racial crimes permits the continual haunting of the state by its past, prevents retributive justice, and inhibits racial reconciliation.²⁶

Black leaders also inhibited racial reconciliation when DuPree rejected demands to bring his department heads before the council and refused to acknowledge that white council members had legitimate concerns about Wynn and Commodore. In late May

American, May 18, 2006; “State Must Admit Role in Kennard Case,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 30, 2006; Rachel Leifer, “Justice for Kennard,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 18, 2006. Rachel Leifer and Reuben Mees, “Family, Friends Rejoice in Exoneration,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 18, 2006.

²⁶ Quoting Memorandum of Richard Barrett in Support of Motion to Reconsider and Vacate Judgment, *Mississippi v. Kennard* (2006), 8-9; Response to Motion to Reconsider, Order Denying Motion to Reconsider; Notice of Appeal, all in *Mississippi v. Kennard* (2006). Reuben Mees, “Court Upholds Exoneration,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 17, 2007.

2006, Bradley, Carroll, and Bailey filed a lawsuit in Forrest County Circuit Court demanding that DuPree resubmit for council approval his department heads. Councilman Bradley had originally supported Wynn because he had suspected some people opposed the chief because of his race. However, as crime rose in Hattiesburg, and as the police officers continued their exodus, Bradley decided otherwise. In response to the lawsuit, DuPree claimed that he was not obligated to seek council approval for standing department heads just as neither the Mississippi governor nor the President of the U. S. resubmitted their cabinet members before their legislative bodies upon reelection.²⁷

During the court battles, Hattiesburg's crime rate soared. Murders increased by 140 percent, robberies by 68 percent, commercial burglary by 23 percent, grand larceny by 27 percent, auto burglary by 56 percent, and arson by 62 percent. Rape statistics remained the same with 29 rapes in both 2005 and 2006. The overall increase in Hattiesburg's crime rate far exceeded the national average. For example violent crimes on the national level had a slight increase of 1.9 percent with a 0.8 increase in murder. Robberies increased by 2 percent, burglary by 1.3 percent, and overall property crimes decreased by 1.9 percent. Amidst the controversy over Wynn, thieves stole computer hard drives from city hall. Police never solved the crime. Wynn's detractors also pointed out that between August 2001 and mid-June 2006, 82 officers left the police force.

²⁷ "Race Raises Its Ugly Head in City Dispute," *Hattiesburg American*, June 11, 2006; *Carter Carroll, C. E. Bailey and Kim Bradley v. Johnny L. DuPree* (2006) case no. CI06-0132, Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as, *Carroll v. DuPree* (2006)]; Reuben Mees, "Councilmen Planned Suit in Private," *Hattiesburg American*, June 10, 2006; Nikki Davis Maute, "Lawsuit is Divisive Issue in City," *Hattiesburg American*, June 11, 2006, "3 Councilmen File Suit Against Mayor," *Hattiesburg American*, May 31, 2006; Reuben Mees, "DuPree Says Law is on his Side," *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 2006; Kim Bradley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 4, 2010, MOHP recording.

Despite rookie replacements, the HPD was still short 36 officers. Once again, the white council members blamed the exodus on Wynn. Bailey claimed that Wynn discriminated against white officers and emphasized that blacks comprised a small fraction of the 82 officers who had left the HPD under Wynn. Black leaders again rushed to Wynn's defense. Fairley stressed that Wynn had greatly reduced police misconduct as the HPD had received 607 complaints during Chief Sims four-year tenure and only 292 under Chief Wynn. Magee and Fairley even insisted that a group of whites conspired to undermine Wynn's leadership by enticing white officers away from the HPD with other jobs so that DuPree would have no choice but to remove him.²⁸

Not all blacks supported Wynn or Commodore or the mayor's case in the lawsuit. Former Councilman Eddie Holloway admired DuPree's determination to bring greater diversity to government, but he contended that the mayor failed to realize that the white council members had legitimate complaints against Wynn and Commodore. Although

²⁸ Janet Braswell, "Crime Rate," *Hattiesburg American*, July 8, 2006; Janet Braswell, "City Hall Burglars," *Hattiesburg American*, June 27, 2006; John Surratt, "High Profile Crimes Still Unresolved," *Hattiesburg American*, November 27, 2006; John Surratt, "56 officers leave HPD in 2 Years," *Hattiesburg American*, January 21, 2007; Janet Braswell, "How Safe do We feel?" *Hattiesburg American*, June 25, 2006; Janet Braswell, "Wynn: Race to Blame for Departures," *Hattiesburg American*, June 20, 2006; Reuben Mees and Janet Braswell, "Denard, Bailey Differ on HPD, Race Issue," *Hattiesburg American*, June 21, 2006, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM. Reuben Mees, "DuPree, Council Search for Peace," *Hattiesburg American*, March 12, 2006; Reuben Mees, "DuPree Says," *Hattiesburg American*, January 19, 2006; Reuben Mees, "Secret Talks Ease Tension," *Hattiesburg American*, March 7, 2006, all in Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM. Janet Braswell, "'I Refuse to Be Run Out,'" *Hattiesburg American*, March 26, 2006; Janet Braswell, "Officers Influenced to Leave HPD," *Hattiesburg American*, July 6, 2006. Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Fred Burns, interviews; Rod Woullard, interview; Clarence Magee, interview. Glenda Funchess, interview, September 26, 2008; Lillie Jackson Easton and Carol Jackson Preyor, September 26, 2008, Clementine Benton, interview, September 26, 2008, all by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. For national crime rates, see, U. S. Department of Justice—Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006*, Uniform Crime Report, September 2007, http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/data/table_01.html.

Holloway considered both of them intelligent people, he argued that they lacked appropriate experience. Wynn had a career in law enforcement, but he had never served in a municipal department, and Commodore had no government experience. Some blacks sent letters to the newspaper to criticize the mayor's lawsuit. Jackson Brown lambasted DuPree for "setting a stereotypical precedent that, if elected to political office, all African Americans will be just like you by ignoring the law and always crying racism."²⁹

Holloway, along with many law enforcement leaders, considered Wynn the more disastrous appointee because the HPD collapsed under his control. Former Chief Wayne Landers noted that as Wynn lost many seasoned officers, the median age of the remaining police was the mid-twenties and the median experience was a little over five years. In other words, the HPD was full of rookies. Sheriff McGee found Wynn's leadership particularly wanting when the chief tried to remove HPD officers from the joint state-county-city metro narcotics task force. McGee considered the task force, which had operated in Forrest County for some 20 years, essential for combating illegal narcotics. Perhaps, Wynn was trying to change the course of the drug wars as he may have considered them an unfair and harmful attack on the black community. Yet other blacks supported aggressive attack on drug crimes. When McGee solicited the aid of his friend, African American Judge Deborah Gambrell, she forced Wynn to keep the HPD in the task force. Although Sheriff McGee and Landers admired DuPree's loyalty to the chief,

²⁹ Quoting Jackson Brown, "Mayor Setting a Bad Example," Letter to the Editor, *Hattiesburg American*, May 24, 2006; Eddie Holloway, interview by Patricia Boyett, September 30, 2008, MOHP recording.

they concluded that he gave Wynn too much time and latitude.³⁰

Many blacks continued to disagree vehemently with the negative assessment of Wynn and Commodore. Although some blacks agreed that Wynn had an abrasive personality that offended some people, they praised his efforts to reform the HPD. They argued that he had terminated the terrorization of black neighborhoods as he had a no-tolerance policy for racial profiling or excessive force. Many of them believed that if allowed to continue on his path, he would build a strong, racially unbiased police force devoted to community policing. Crime might rise in the interim, but eventually his policies would make black communities safer and stronger. Many blacks expressed similar attitudes toward Commodore. For example, Councilwoman Denard supported Commodore's constant critique of Public Service Director Bennie Sellers who blacks perceived as obstructing all efforts by the black council members and Mayor DuPree to rebuild black communities. Finally, considering the history of racial struggles in Hattiesburg, it is not surprising that DuPree and his inner circle took exception to the criticism of black directors. To accept criticism of Wynn and Commodore as valid, particularly when it came mostly from whites, was to violate the basic survival instinct of African Americans. Long ago, blacks learned that whites sought to conquer civil rights efforts by turning blacks against each other. Moreover, too often in white America, whites judged the failings of one black individual as reflective of the failings of the entire race. Whites never applied that collective judgment to their own race. Intra-racial solidarity had allowed blacks to survive under Jim Crow and to fight their oppression

³⁰ Wayne Landers, interview; Eddie Holloway, interview; Billy McGee, interview; Charlie Sims, interview. Charles Bolton, interview, May 8, 2009, by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recording.

during the Civil Rights Movement and post-civil rights era. Now that blacks had assumed power, many of them felt compelled to defend the administration from white attacks and to prove that blacks could rule as well, if not better, than whites. Most whites perceived it differently and argued that DuPree's inner circle was practicing the very racial discrimination they had long condemned.³¹

Many whites and some blacks focused their ire on Fairley as they considered him a racist, and many of them argued that he enjoyed an undue influence over the mayor and the chief. In contrast, Fairley's supporters insisted that he was a victim, not a perpetrator of racism. As one of the most intelligent and charismatic leaders in Hattiesburg, Fairley had always carried great loyalty from the masses and his friends. Burns considered Fairley the most important racial crusader in Hattiesburg, and he noted with admiration that despite the attacks that led to the minister's near financial ruin and disgrace, "Rev has never left the fight." Other blacks, particularly NAACP leaders Jeanette Smith and Nathan Jordon, perceived Fairley's approach as overly aggressive and even harmful. Although both Sheriff McGee and Eddie Holloway liked Fairley, they considered him a divisive leader. Many whites denounced the reverend as a black supremacist and a criminal. In the fall of 2006, Fairley's reputation further suffered when his sons Kenneth, Jr. and William Vaston pled guilty to federal charges in a mortgage flipping scheme. Fairley claimed that white elites had targeted his sons because they hoped to bring him down with them even though he was not involved in the affair. Many whites, including

³¹ Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Fred Burns, interviews; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Cheryl Outlaw, interview; Carroll Carter, interview; Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical White Studies*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 238.

Councilman Bradley, thought otherwise. Bradley called Reverend Fairley “the Teflon man [because] he never gets indicted.” Reverend Fairley insisted that all such accusations were part of a conspiracy to destroy his racial crusade. He stressed that he had called upon his parishioners to fight for racial equality and reconciliation. Although his parishioners and the students at his private academy were predominantly black, he welcomed whites and interracial couples, and he had hired white employees and a white minister. Still, he also launched protests against organizations that seemed undeserving of his accusations.³²

In the summer of 2006, Fairley went too far for most Hub City residents when he compared the fight to remove Wynn to a “lynching.” Further exacerbating racial tensions, Fairley accused a myriad of businesses and institutions, including Forrest General Hospital, the Area Development Partnership (APD), USM, the local media, and several banks of implementing racially discriminatory hiring practices. He threatened to summon national civil rights organizations to Hattiesburg to help him launch a mass protest “Operation We Will Not Go Back,” meaning he refused to allow the city to return to a

³² First quote, Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; second quote, Kim Bradley interview. Eddie Holloway, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Billy McGee, interview; Carter Carroll, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews; Rod Woullard, interview. Jeanette Smith, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2009; Nathan Jordan, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 11, 2009; MOHP recordings. *United States v. Richard Lucas et al.* (2009), case no. 2:06-cr-00001-KS-MTP, United States District Court, Southern District Court of Mississippi, William F. Colmer Federal Building, Hattiesburg, Mississippi John Surratt, “Five Sentenced in Flipping Scheme,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 2, 2007; “Five Defendants Plead Guilty,” Press Release, October 19, 2006, The United States District Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Mississippi; <http://www.mortgagefraud.org/?fs=2007012512222267¤tPage=238>. Alpha Christian School, Private School Review, website: http://www.privateschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/15371 and Mt Carmel Alpha Christian School, Private School Review, website: Website: http://www.privateschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/15593.

Jim Crow system. The leaders of the accused institutions refuted the charges of racial discrimination as each of them declared that their employees reflected the diversity of Hattiesburg, and they stressed that they used aggressive affirmative action policies in recruiting and hiring. Even DuPree opposed publicly the beckoning of national civil rights organizations to Hattiesburg. Some blacks stressed that Fairley did not speak for all blacks, and they opposed his protest.³³

The summer battles exhausted the city, and many residents hoped the council lawsuit coming to trial in September would terminate the racial bickering over the balance of power. They were disappointed. On September 31, 2006, Judge Helfrich ruled that a re-elected mayor must resubmit immediately standing department heads for council approval on the grounds that since council members are responsible to their constituents for the health of Hattiesburg, which relied in part on the aptitude of its directors, then they have the right to review department heads after each election. DuPree appealed.³⁴ Council and mayoral relations disintegrated.

Racial hostilities also plagued Laurel in the new millennium; however, the division did not cut cleanly across racial lines in the governing bodies. Throughout the history of the Central Piney Woods, racial hostilities were always more raw and fierce in

³³ Quoting “Race Raises its Ugly Head in City Dispute,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 11, 2006. Janet Braswell, “Race Issue Would Hurt Economy,” *Hattiesburg American*, June 9, 2006; Jackson Brown, “Mayor Setting a Bad Example,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 24, 2006; Cheryl Outlaw, interview.

³⁴ Finding of Fact and Conclusion of Law, and Order Petition for Writ Mandamus, both in *Carroll v. DuPree* (2006); Nikki Davis Maute, “Appeal Does Not Surprise Council,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 30, 2006; Nikki Davis Maute, “Dispute Costs Nearly \$7,000,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 2006, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM; “DuPree Must Submit his Department Heads,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 1, 2006; “Mayor Should Do the Right Thing,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 2006; Robert Helfrich, interview, May 4, 2009.

Laurel than in Hattiesburg and explosions of racial hatred more blatant. Yet much had changed in Laurel's political arenas as power players like Mayor Vincent and Councilman Johnny DuPree crossed racial lines to champion a more just and biracial society, and in so doing, they fostered respectful biracial relationships among the core of the city leadership. Still, racial relations remained fragile and easily frayed because Laurel's tortured racial history and the still largely segregated society cultivated distrust between the races. The council also had some racists on both sides of the color line that sometimes incited and/or exacerbated racial tensions in the city. The battles that ensued sometimes temporarily weakened the biracial bonds in the core body politic, but never broke them, and ultimately they grew stronger. The citizenry, however, lagged behind its leaders, and disagreements over annexation, school funding, the police department, and charges of racism against prominent citizens intensified racial animosity and advanced the racial divide in the city.³⁵

Nothing ignited more racial animosity in Jones County in the new millennium than the battles over annexation. During Vincent's second term, she and the city council unanimously voted to annex three parcels of Jones County, two predominantly white communities Sharon and Shady Grove, and two predominantly black communities Pendorff and the Western area. The city leaders contended that the annexation would attract greater development and prosperity while simultaneously providing the annexed residents with better services. At first, most Pendorff and Western area residents supported annexation. Contrarily, most Shady Grove and Sharon residents opposed it, and they formed an anti-annexation group to fight annexation in chancery court. When

³⁵ Susan Vincent, interview, June 12, 2009 and Johnny Magee, interview, May 12, 2009, both by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings.

the court approved annexation of the Pendorff and Western parcels, but denied it for Shady Grove and Sharon, the city appealed, and the case dragged on for 11 years. White residents claimed that they opposed the annexation because it would require them to pay ad valorem taxes. Vincent argued otherwise: she contended that most of them harbored racist attitudes. As blacks became the majority population in the city, whites resisted the efforts of city leaders to make them a part of, as they perceived it, “a black town.” Moreover, many whites resided in the county to avoid sending their children to predominantly black schools. City leaders explained that Mississippi statutes prevented the city from forcing children in annexed sections to attend city schools. However, whites feared that the federal courts would eventually find the law unconstitutional.³⁶

The struggle grew more racially divisive at the onset of Mayor Vincent’s third term when several black leaders supported the anti-annexation lawsuit because they realized that annexation would tip the racial demography of the city from a black to a white majority. During the trial, Shady Grove’s expert witness, Joe Lusteck, testified that the annexation would decrease Laurel’s black population from 55.08 percent black to 46.96 percent. James Jones, an NAACP leader and a former city councilman, testified that because blacks needed majority districts of about 65 to 70 percent to elect a black person, the shift in the racial demography would inhibit the election of black candidates. A white man, Jones Brogdon, who served on the council when the annexation efforts

³⁶ Quoting, Susan Vincent, interview. Annexation Ordinance, June 17, 1997, *Laurel City Council Minutes Book*, vol. 73, 371-383, Office of City Clerk, City Hall, Laurel, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Laurel City Council Minutes*]; Appellate briefs and court ruling, *City of Laurel, Mississippi v. Sharon Waterworks Association, Shady Grove Utility District, Shady Grove Water Association, Other Objectors* (2009), case no. 2007-AN-01547-SCT, Clerk’s Office for the Supreme Court of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Laurel v. Shady Grove* (2009)].

began, claimed that city leaders first sought annexation precisely because they hoped to shift the racial demographic balance in the city and its schools to favor whites. Witnesses for the city pointed out that all five black council members had voted in favor of annexation. Moreover, during the recent mayoral election, blacks voted overwhelmingly for Vincent over Jim Cegielski even though he opposed annexation. In March 2002, Judge J. B. Reeves rejected the city's appeal. The city appealed to the Mississippi Supreme Court, and the case dragged on for six more years. The embittered battles over annexation revealed how profoundly racial breaches were harming Laurel's opportunities for growth and prosperity. Vincent perceived the annexation battle as reflective of white racism, but also of a rising black racism.³⁷

Laurel had achieved a much politer racial discourse in public venues, but, as Vincent noted, racial animosities bred below the surface, and its sporadic public emergence fed racial tensions in the city. Because the racial balance of power had shifted to blacks, when whites, particularly persons holding public office, uttered racist remarks in public venues, political consequences were dire. Henry Thompson, a white election commissioner in Laurel, soon learned that lesson. On October 30, 2003, Margaret Brown, a black city hall employee, overheard Thompson complain to white clerks that his water bill was so high because "the mayor was trying to pay for them niggers working on the

³⁷ Brief, *Laurel v. Shady Grove*. (2009), 40-41, Sylvia Regina Waters, "City's Final Witness Takes Stand," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 30, 2001; Shawn Wansly, "Annexation Hot Topic in Mayor Race," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 6, 2001; Ryan Griffin, "Vincent Wins Another Term," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 6, 2001; Steve Swogetinsky, "Judge Rules Against City's Annexation Plan," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 21, 2003; Sylvia Regina Waters, "Kenney Folds," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 2002; Sylvia Regina Waters, "Annexation Motion Dies from Lack of Second," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 4, 2002; Jason Niblett, "City Council Votes to Appeal Judge's Decision," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 18, 2003; Susan Vincent, interview.

sewer lines.” Brown stormed out of her office and asked Thompson to repeat his statement. Thompson ignored her until she filed a complaint. Only then did he apologize. Thompson’s easy use of a racial slur shocked one of his African American colleagues, Daphne Drummond, because during their conversations, he seemed sensitive to racial issues. In a letter to the local paper, Drummond asserted that considering Thompson’s racial attitude, blacks could not trust election results as long as he served as the commissioner. Councilman Manuel Jones and the NAACP demanded Thompson’s resignation. When he refused to resign, the city council voted unanimously in March 2004 to rescind the appointment, and Vincent signed the order. The trust between the races was tenuous, and the duplicity of Thompson intensified the belief among some blacks that they could never trust whites, for it seemed to them that in public many whites showed one face of racial tolerance, but among their own race they wore the face of white supremacy.³⁸ That belief, however, sometimes led to erroneous charges of racism.

In May 2001, President George W. Bush’s nomination of Laurel’s own Judge Charles Pickering to the U. S. District Court of Appeals for the Fifth District in New Orleans unveiled problems with racial witch hunts and northern prejudice against white southerners. The appointment of Pickering, a conservative Republican, worried liberal Democrats. Northern elites attacked Pickering as an unrepentant southern racist, for they

³⁸ Quoting Jason Niblett, “City Employees Complain About Racial Slurs,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 5, 2003. Jason Niblett, “NAACP Questions City Council About Racial Slurs,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 7, 2004; Daphne Drummond, “Commissioner Questioned,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 19, 2001; City Council Meeting, January 6, 2004, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 82, 629-631; City Council Meeting, March 16, 2004, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 83, 102-103; Manuel Jones, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), February 22, 2006, MOHP recording; Anthony Wheat, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 5, 2010, MOHP recording; Dennis Keyvyrn, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 7, 2010, MOHP recording. Susan Vincent, interview.

assumed that southern conservatives were white supremacists. As politically conservative writer Harry Stein noted, “Having grown up defining themselves in opposition to the draconian land of Jim Crow, they’ve never lost their sense of superiority.” Marcia Kuntz of the Alliance for Justice called Pickering “a throwback to the old, segregated South.” The Democratic Party and various civil rights organizations, including the national and Mississippi NAACP, the Mississippi Chapter of the Southern Leadership Conference, the Magnolia Bar Association, the Mississippi Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, and the Minority Caucus of the Mississippi Supervisor’s Association, mobilized to prevent Pickering’s confirmation. On the local level, Manuel Jones of the Jones County NAACP and Clarence Magee of the Forrest County NAACP also opposed the nomination.³⁹

Pickering’s opponents only viewed slices of his history, and they often presented distorted versions of the evidence they uncovered. Without a doubt, Pickering was a conservative Republican, but he was not an unrepentant southern racist. Like most white southerners of his generation, Pickering initially accepted and even supported the segregationist system. During the 2002 and 2003 congressional hearings, Pickering’s detractors emphasized that Pickering wrote a paper during his first year of law school in 1959 in which he argued that the state should repair loopholes in its anti-miscegenation statutes that barred interracial marriages. In 1964, Pickering switched from the

³⁹ First quote, Harry Stein, “Charles Pickering Gets the Last Word,” *City Journal*, June 15, 2007, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.aspx?GUID=F3E02B9A-29CE-4F95-A5...>, (accessed June 2007); second quote, Neil A. Lewis, “Fight Over Judicial Nominee Resumes,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2002. Ryan Griffin, “Pickering Nominated to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals,” *Laurel Leader Call*, May 26, 2001; “Group Opposes Pickering Nomination,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 25, 2001; Derrick Johnson, “‘60 Minutes’ Missed Pickering’s Real Record,” *Jackson Free Press*, April 21, 2004, <http://www.jacksonfree press.com> (accessed June 2008); Manuel Jones, interview; “60 Minutes in the Pine Belt,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2004.

Democratic to the Republican Party after the Democrats gave two at-large seats to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) at the Democratic Convention. A year later, he defended Congressman William Colmer against the MFDP Congressional Challenge. Pickering's opponents, however, incorrectly claimed that he had ties to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. Actually, as a state legislator, he had voted to terminate it. Pickering's detractors also lambasted the judge for delivering a short prison sentence to Daniel Swan, who was convicted of burning a cross on an interracial couple's lawn. By portraying Pickering as soft on a white supremacist, they suggested his collusion with racist thinking.⁴⁰ The portrait, however, distorted reality, and it ignored how much Pickering had changed as he came of age in the 1960s.

Judge Pickering's supporters portrayed him as "a kind of Atticus Finch," who had risked his life by attacking the Klan. While county attorney in 1965, Pickering had convinced Mayor Henry Bucklew to condemn publicly the Klan in a statement Pickering had authored that castigated Klansmen as "mob fiends" and "traitors." Pickering had also authored a petition opposing the hooded order that he, and all major officials in Laurel, signed. For these acts, Pickering became a Klan target. Despite the dangers, in the late sixties, he testified in the Vernon Dahmer murder trials against Sam Bowers, and he prosecuted several Klansmen on various felony charges in Jones County, albeit

⁴⁰ Stein, "Charles Pickering Gets the Last Word"; Bob Hebert, "A Judge's Past," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2002; Neil A. Lewis, "Judicial Confirmation Hearing Evokes Civil Rights Struggle," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2002; Neil A. Lewis, "Fight Over Judicial Nominee Resumes," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2002; "An UnWorthy Judicial Nomination," *The New York Times*, February 24, 2002, all in New York Times Article Archive, [hereinafter cited as NYT Article Archive]. For Pickering's legal work on the MFDP congressional challenge, see Maurice Danton to William Colmer, February 7, 1965 and William Colmer to Judge Darwin Maples, February 22, 1965, both in William Colmer Papers, McCain, USM.

unsuccessfully. In 1998, as federal judge, he ordered sealed federal records opened in the DABURN case, which helped Robert Helfrich convict Bowers for Dahmer's murder. Pickering also turned against segregation. In the 1970s, he sent his children to the integrated schools rather than all-white private academies, he integrated his church, and he led racial reconciliation organizations. In the cross burning case, *United States v. Swan*, the Department of Justice allowed the ring-leader and Swan's accomplice to plead guilty and avoid incarceration so Swan refused an offer by Attorney General Janet Reno to serve an 18-month sentence in exchange for his guilty plea. After his conviction, he faced a maximum sentence of seven-and-one-half years. Pickering had a reputation for delivering lesser sentences to young defendants, regardless of their race, if like Swan, they lacked a criminal record. So Pickering sentenced Swan to 27 months in prison, nine months longer than the plea deal Reno had offered. After delivering the sentence, Pickering condemned Swan's vile act, and he suggested that he study racial relations.⁴¹

The controversy that erupted in the Central Piney Woods created positive and negative developments. On the negative front, it divided the black community as many blacks were convinced by the media reports and some of their leaders that Pickering was a racist. Others knew differently. And they dared to cross racial lines and join Pickering's

⁴¹ First quote, Neil A. Lewis, "Fight Over Judicial Nominee Resumes," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2002, NYT Article Archive; second and third quotes, Staff, "60 Minutes in the Pine Belt," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2004. Charles Pickering, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), September 7, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 785, 787, 790-791, 794-796, 813-814, MOHP; Rich Campbell, "Evidence Supports Pickering," *Hattiesburg American*, February 3, 2002; Editorial, *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 16, 2003; "Jones County a Better Place Because of Charles Pickering," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 4, 2004; Crystal Dupré, "Get the Facts," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 19, 2004; Stein, "Charles Pickering Gets the Last Word"; "Judge Pickering Denies Racism," *CBS News*, March 28, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/25/60minutes/> (accessed June 2008).

white supporters in a biracial defense of a man they had come to respect. The editors of the *Laurel Leader-Call* and the *Hattiesburg American*, many members of the NAACP, four of the five black Laurel city council members, and prominent black citizens, including Charles Evers and Ellie Dahmer, rushed to his defense. A host of black lawyers, including Hattiesburg city attorney, Charles Lawrence, who had tried cases before Pickering, described him as one of the fairest judges in the state. Even Reverend Fairley, who accused a host of whites of racism, invited the judge's detractors to peruse Pickering's favorable record toward black civil rights cases. African American Councilman Johnny Magee and Jones County Supervisor Melvin Mack wrote letters to Congress supporting Pickering's nomination. Mack even testified in front of Congress on Pickering's behalf. Magee considered testifying as well but then decided against it because the issue was dividing the black community.⁴²

Pickering was an important figure in the Central Piney Woods community because he represented its hope for change. He was not a racist villain, though he had once embraced segregation; nor was he a flawless civil rights hero, though he had committed heroic acts. Rather, he emerged from ordinary white southern circumstances that led him to initially accept segregation, but through a deep moral and intellectual examination of his segregated world, he grew to disdain the horrors innate in the white

⁴² Rich Campbell, "Evidence Supports Pickering," *Hattiesburg American*, February 3, 2002; "60 Minutes in the Pine Belt," *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2004; Editorial, *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 16, 2003; "Jones County a Better Place Because of Charles Pickering," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 4, 2004; Charles Marsh, *The Last Days A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 185; Johnny Magee, interview. Maycie Gore, interview, June 10, 2009; Gladys Austin, interview, May 5, 2009; and Cora Wade Seals, interview, May 5, 2009, all by Patricia Boyett, MOHP recordings. Melvin Mack, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 17, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792, 678-679.

supremacist system. As a result, he willed himself to rise beyond his peers, divest himself of his segregationist beliefs, and challenge racial oppression. Pickering was disappointed that he would never serve on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, but he was devastated over the dishonest portrayal of his character. As he later lamented, “to accuse a white southerner of being a racist is about the worst thing you can do.” After the travesty, Judge Pickering persisted in his racial reconciliation efforts, further revealing that the judge, though a fiscal and cultural conservative, was a racial liberal, and that these philosophies were not incongruent. Surely, some of his detractors understood that, but as Charles Lawrence concluded, Pickering had become a “victim of party politics” through an unfair play of the race card.⁴³

Race card politics constantly infected the Laurel milieu in the new millennium, but as in the Pickering affair, an intricate landscape of racial perspectives existed behind these Manichean dramas. Consequently, it grew increasingly difficult to decipher the intent behind racial clashes, particularly as some politicians seized on racial confrontations for political and personal gain. Black community leader Joseph Jones constantly used race card politics to shield his criminal activities. His rise to political power began in April 2002 after a grand jury indicted Thaddeus Edmonson, a black councilman representing ward seven, on charges of inducing a businessman to bribe a public official. During a citizens’ forum, Jones demanded that Edmonson resign and castigated him for bringing “shame to our community and hurt[ing] many people.” Edmonson refused. The following year, a jury convicted Edmonson based on recorded evidence of the bribe, and Judge Billy Landrum sent him to prison. Landrum had

⁴³ First quote, “Judge Pickering Denies Racism”; second quote, Staff, “‘60 Minutes’ in the Pine Belt,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 18, 2004.

removed one corrupt politician only to have the constituents elect Jones, a far more reprehensible criminal. Many of Jones' constituents invested their faith in him as he seemed an advocate of the downtrodden. Mayor Vincent and Captain Tyrone Stewart knew better. For years, Mayor Vincent had heard the rumors that Jones dealt drugs and pimped prostitutes in the black community, and she remained convinced that he had instigated the gang violence that erupted in Brown Circle in 1994. In early 2000, Jones' wife, Serita, contacted Officer Stewart to report that Jones had a habit of molesting young girls, and she informed him that he had impregnated a 13-year-old. During the investigation, the victim admitted that she had birthed Jones' stillborn baby. According to Vincent, however, a white council member with ties to Jones, pressured the district attorney's office to terminate the investigation.⁴⁴

Once Jones became a councilman, he used the race card to avoid paying traffic tickets and to initiate lawsuits against the city in hopes of financial gain. In the fall of 2003, police charged Jones with a series of violations, including public intoxication and drunk driving. The city court also charged him with contempt of court for failing to pay 148 traffic tickets over 10 years. Jones filed an injunction against the contempt proceedings as well as a \$4.5 million lawsuit against Mayor Vincent, the City of Laurel,

⁴⁴ Quoting Sylvia Regina Walters, "Citizens Call for Edmonson to Resign," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 22, 2002. *Thaddeus Edmonson, Appellant, v. State of Mississippi* (2004), case no. 2003-KA-01088-COA, 1, 3-4, 7. Court of Appeals of Mississippi, 906 So. 2d 73; 2004, Miss. App. LEXIS 1124; Sylvia Regina Walters, "Jury Hears Opening Statements in Edmonson Trial," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 2, 2003; Sylvia Regina Walters, "Edmonson Found Guilty," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 5, 2003; Sylvia Regina Walters, "Edmonson Gets Five Year Sentence," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 18, 2003; Jason Niblett, "Jones Takes Seat as Ward 7 Councilman," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 29, 2003; *Joseph Glenn Jones v. State of Mississippi* (2008), case no. 2006-KA-01243-COA, 1, 3-4, 7, Court of Appeals of Mississippi, 991 So. 2d. 629 2008 Miss. LEXIS 236, [hereinafter cited as *Jones v. Mississippi* (2008)]; Susan Vincent, interview.

the Jones County Court, and Judge Gaylor Harper for violating his First Amendment Rights to freedom of speech and assembly, and his Fourteenth Amendment rights to due process and equal protection of the law. Jones' attorney claimed that the city and the LPD had targeted Jones because he was a black man who dared to criticize city leaders. Several defense witnesses testified that the city enslaved black males by overwhelming them with traffic violation fines. Captain Stewart, an African American LPD officer, emphatically denied that the LPD harassed black men. Rather, he declared that Jones used such lies to avoid paying his fines. Jones lost his cases, and on August 14, 2004, the judge ordered him to work off his over \$8,000 fines through community service. After the trials, Jones continued to accuse the LPD of engaging in systematic harassment of African Americans to obfuscate his criminal activities. As long as people believed that police targeted black citizens, they might doubt the legitimacy of charges against him, the LPD's most vocal opponent. Despite Jones' nefarious motives, he represented some genuine victims who suffered from police harassment and excessive force.⁴⁵

Between 2002 and 2005, the city council held several citizens' forums to discuss police brutality complaints. Mayor Vincent considered some of the complaints valid and others unwarranted. Rookie officers usually caused the most problems because, as Vincent noted, "a new policeman is kind of like having a team of wild horses. You want them to pull the load, but you don't want them to go too far and too fast, but you don't want them to go slow. It's a really delicate balance in between. Younger ones go to the

⁴⁵ Jason Niblett, "Judge Rules City Can Proceed," *Laurel Leader-Call*, December 9, 2003; Brian Livingston, "Judge Sends Red Light in Jones Case," *Laurel Leader-Call*, August 14, 2004; City Council Meeting, November 16, 2004, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 84, [?]; "Citizens Charge Police Brutality," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 17, 2004; Jason Niblett, "Councilman Sues City of Laurel," *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 18, 2003; Susan Vincent, interview.

academy and they get pepper gas, and a baton, and handcuffs, and a gun, and authority—mostly authority They have to learn some discretion and not be over aggressive.” Councilman Magee emphasized that most of the misconduct involved a few officers, not the entire department. Councilman Manuel Jones perceived the lack of black police as part of the problem as he stressed that only 13 of the 62 officers in the predominantly black city were African Americans.⁴⁶

Although many of the battles over police brutality accusations became racially charged and almost always involved black complainants, blacks accused black officers of brutality as much as their white counterparts; and white leaders often came to the defense of black victims and black police. A majority of complaints were levied against Captain Tyrone Stewart, a black officer. Several council members demanded that Vincent fire him, but an internal investigation determined that complaints against Stewart were unwarranted. Moreover, Vincent and Magee considered Stewart the best officer in the city. When he was only 33-years-old, Vincent had tried to promote him to chief, but he declined because he had a family to support, and the position lacked civil service protection.⁴⁷

One of the bitterest battles over charges of police brutality involved Mark Brewer, a white officer, and Clarence Satcher, a black officer. According to the officers, while they questioned blacks in a drug investigation on Walley Street in March 2001, an African American, Larry K. Breland, tried to incite the crowd against them. When Satcher arrested him, Breland resisted, even after Satchel placed one handcuff around his

⁴⁶ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview. Johnny Magee, interview; Sylvia Regina Waters, “Jones Wants Better Racial Balance in LPD,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 25, 2002.

⁴⁷ Susan Vincent, interview; Johnny Magee, interview

wrist. To help his fellow officer without harming bystanders, Officer Brewer released his canine partner Rex, who in line with his training, held Breland still with his teeth.

Conversely, Breland claimed that Satcher handcuffed him, threw him to the ground, and smashed his face in the dirt while Brewer's dog attacked him. The LPD should have possessed a recording of the incident because cameras installed on all its vehicles automatically began recording when officers turned on their vehicle lights or activated their body microphones. The tape, however, had disappeared.⁴⁸

Although the citizenry was divided across racial lines over the incident, the city leadership's response was more nuanced. Vincent and all the whites and blacks on the council supported an internal investigation of the incident that resulted in the firing of Officer Brewer and a two-week suspension of Officer Satcher. Brewer appealed. In May 2002, the judge found Breland guilty of resisting arrest and acquitted Brewer on brutality charges, eliciting raucous cheers from the mostly white audience. Infuriated, blacks flocked to NAACP meetings at which Manuel Jones compared the incident to the Selma-to-Montgomery March when white police sent dogs after black protestors. The Civil Service Commission ordered Mayor Vincent to reinstate Brewer, but Vincent appealed, and Breland filed a federal lawsuit against Brewer and Satcher for the violation of his civil rights. As the legal battle dragged on for the next two years, Vincent often argued with Anthony Wheat, the white chair of the Civil Service Commission, over the incident. Wheat, a family friend of the Vincents, stressed that Breland had a long criminal record

⁴⁸ "Officials Discuss Officer's Dismissal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 11, 2001; "Dog Biting Case Still Hounding Brewer and Breland," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 9, 2004; "Jury Deliberation Decision," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 9, 2004; "Dog Biting Incident Howls for Further Investigation," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 11, 2004; Anthony Wheat, interview; Susan Vincent, interview.

and that no other citizen had filed complaints against Brewer before the Breland incident. Vincent retorted that both officers weighed around 250 pounds and surely possessed the strength to subdue Breland, a slender man, without the dog. They had exercised poor judgment and excessive force because Breland annoyed them, and because Brewer wanted to use his new dog. The city lost its appeal, and Breland lost his lawsuit. Although it appears Brewer did not receive further complaints, controversy persisted over the LPD, and many of them surrounded Joseph Jones.⁴⁹

Jones remained a constant adversary of Vincent and the LPD. He spread lies that Vincent belonged to the Klan, and he even claimed that she had killed someone. When he learned that the LPD had received numerous complaints against James T. Kirkley, a white officer, Jones targeted him. On October 15, 2004, Jones approached Officer Kirkley on the steps of the police department, and in a threatening manner, he warned him that if he failed to cease abusing black citizens of Brown and Johnson Circle, he would bring him before a council review board. Afterward, Kirkley filed charges of assault against Jones as he claimed that the councilman had threatened him and appeared prepared to physically attack him. In early January, just weeks before the case came to trial, the LPD fired Kirkley for alleged misconduct against locals. Kirkley's wife accused the LPD of firing her husband to pander to Councilman Jones. On January 22, 2005, at

⁴⁹ "Black Citizens Gather to Support Council in Appeal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 10, 2002; City Council Meeting, July 2, 2002, *Laurel City Council Minutes*, vol. 80, 356; Anthony Wheat, interview; Susan Vincent, interview; "Officials Discuss Officer's Dismissal," *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 11, 2001; "Residents Upset," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 23, 2002; "Reinstated Officer," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 29, 2002; "Dog Biting Case Still Hounding Brewer and Breland," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 9, 2004; "Jury Deliberation Decision," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 9, 2004; "Federal Civil Rights Trial Ends," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 11, 2004; "Dog Biting Incident Howls for Further Investigation," *Laurel Leader-Call*, March 11, 2004.

Jones' trial for assault, other officers affirmed Kirkley's charges against Jones. Judge Howell Beech found Jones not guilty as he asserted that he doubted that Kirkley, "a veteran officer, while on the steps of a police department and in the company of other officers, could have felt so much fear as to warrant this charge." Although it seems likely that Kirkley mistreated blacks and abused his power based on the breadth of complaints against him and his discharge, Jones' criminal past also suggests that he threatened Kirkley.⁵⁰

Jones' past was about to destroy his façade as a civil rights crusader when in early 2005, the new District Attorney Anthony Buckley and his Assistant District Attorney J. Ronald Parish reopened the sexual battery case against him. On Parish's request, Mayor Vincent acquired Jones' DNA. She hosted a party in city hall and served apple cider—Jones' favorite drink—in Styrofoam cups and handed him a cup that she had labeled JJ on the bottom. After the party, she retrieved his cup from the garbage and delivered it to authorities. Soon afterward, Parish acquired tissue samples from Jones' alleged victim and her stillborn child from South Central Regional Medical Center. Lab DNA tests revealed that Jones was the father of the 13-year-old victim's fetus. Parish, Vincent, and Stewart kept the investigation secret. While investigators tried to track down the victim, who had left the state, Vincent began her mayoral campaign for a fourth term.⁵¹

Vincent confronted a tough campaign because she had spent much of her third term fighting for the increasingly unpopular annexation ordinance, and because Melvin

⁵⁰ Quoting "Councilman Found Not Guilty," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 22, 2005. "Officers Dismissed," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 6, 2005; "No to Self Investigation of LPD Response," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 16, 2005; Johnny Magee, interview.

⁵¹ Susan Vincent, interview; *Jones v. Mississippi* (2008), 3-4.

Mack, a popular black councilman, ran against her. Many of Vincent's black supporters, including Lula Cooley, still approved of Vincent, but decided it was time for a black mayor. Vincent, realizing that she could not win the Democratic primary against a black man this time around, ran as an independent. Many white county residents, who opposed annexation of their communities, donated money to Mack's campaign. According to a *Laurel Leader-Call* poll, most citizens of the city agreed that the election would break down along racial lines with whites voting for Vincent and blacks for Mack. As the editors declared, some blacks "believe somehow a black mayor will miraculously improve black life and some whites believe somehow he will ultimately destroy the city." The editors lamented, "Forget about red and blue states, we've got black and white blocks in Laurel." Still, some blacks crossed racial lines in support of Vincent, including longtime civil rights activist Maycie Gore and Councilman Magee.⁵²

Mack won the election, and in July he became the first black mayor in Laurel's history. Mack had many important supporters including Judge Pickering, who at the mayor's inauguration, noted that Mack had stood by him during his ordeal with the federal judgeship. Councilman Joseph Jones was elated that Mack had defeated Vincent. He declared that "racism was here when we got here, but . . . we will take every measure to ensure that reverse racism doesn't happen." Days after the election, Jones hung a sign at the main intersection of his ward that declared "Bye, Bye Susan . . . and good

⁵² First quote, "New Mayor Deserves Fair Chance," *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 14, 2005; second quote, Editorial, *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 5, 2005. Susan Vincent, interview; Johnny Magee, interview; Maycie Gore, interview, Cora Wade-Seals, interview. Lula Cooley, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 13, 2010, MOHP recording. For Mack's background, see, Eloria Newell, "Mack Takes his Seat on City Council," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 9, 1991, Politics Vertical File, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Library and Archives, Laurel, Mississippi.

riddance.” When Mack saw the sign, he ordered it removed. Jones would not have long to provoke continual racial unrest in the city.⁵³

Less than six months later, police arrested Jones on sexual battery charges. Jones claimed that his enemies had fabricated the allegations to remove him from the council. When Jones’ case came to trial in May 2006, his teenage victim testified that he paid her to have sex with him and impregnated her. She disobeyed his order to have an abortion, but their baby died in childbirth. Experts testified that the DNA retrieved from the fetus, the victim’s blood, and Jones’ blood showed that to a 99.7 percent certainty, Jones had fathered her stillborn baby. Jones neglected to call a single defense witness, and authorities soon learned that he had a “ringer” on the jury who had promised to vote for an acquittal. The judge replaced the juror in question with an alternate—both of whom were African Americans. The jury convicted Jones, and Judge Landrum sentenced him to 30 years in prison. Jones appealed, but he lost. The removal of Jones eased racial tensions.⁵⁴ Still, the rise of a black man to Laurel’s highest office led to some initial

⁵³ First quote “New Laurel Leaders Emphasize Unity,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 10, 2005; second quote, Jeanette Edwards, “Councilman Joseph Jones, Ward 7 Places “Good-bye” Sign,” June 11, 2005. “Melvin Mack Becomes the First Black Mayor of Laurel,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 2, 2005; “Mack Unseats Vincent as Mayor,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 8, 2005. “New Mayor Deserves Fair Chance,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, June 14, 2005;

⁵⁴ Quoting Susan Vincent, interview. *State of Mississippi v. Joseph Glen Jones*, (2005), case no. 2005-149-KR2 (2005), *Jones County, Second District: General Docket State Cases Circuit Court*, vol. 13, 171-173; *State of Mississippi v. Joseph Glen Jones*, (2005), case no. 2005-149-KR2 (2005), *Jones County, Second District: Minute Book Circuit Court*, vol. 140, 412; *State of Mississippi v. Joseph Glen Jones*, (2005), Sentence Order (2006), case no. 2005-149-KR2, *Minute Book*, vol. 140, 412, all in Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi; “Jones Headed to Court,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 15, 2006; Brian Livingston, “Constituents React,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 4, 2005; Brian Livingston, “Blood Drawn on Jones,” January 21, 2006; Brian Livingston, “Former Councilman Found Guilty,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 19, 2006; *Jones v. State of*

racial hostilities.

Early in his term, Mayor Mack faced some criticism over his appointment of African Americans to high ranking city positions. A new white council member, Anthony Wheat, noted that many black community leaders had pressured Mack to appoint African Americans to head all the departments. In a letter to the local paper, a white citizen lambasted Mack as a racist, and he accused the mayor of planning to remove all whites from public safety departments and use black law enforcement to reap revenge upon whites for the black sufferings of the past. He cited as proof of his accusations Mack's appointment of African American Marvin Lindsey to chief and Lindsey's promotion of blacks to top ranks in the LPD. Deputy Chief Eddy Ingram defended Mack and Lindsey. He stressed that he was white, and for the past 25 years he had worked harmoniously with black officers, including Chief Lindsey and Deputy Chief Walter Martin.⁵⁵

Mack certainly brought more diversity to Laurel than the governing bodies in the county where whites dominated the population 71.1 to 26.3 percent. Whites held four of the five county supervisor positions, all the school board slots, and both the district lawyer and superintendent were white. The sheriff, all the sheriff investigators, and 23 of the 26 persons in the deputy patrol units were white. In Laurel, the city tipped toward a black dominant population at 55.1 to 40.6 percent, which had led to the election of a

Mississippi (2008), 3-4; Brief, *Joseph Glenn Jones v. State of Mississippi* (2007) case no. 2006-KA-1243, 4-5, Clerk' Office for the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, Court of Appeals of the State of Mississippi; Joseph G. Jones Prison Record, MDOC #118373, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

⁵⁵ Thomas J. Mobley, "New Laurel Resident Criticizes LPD, Mayor," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 16, 2005; "Melvin Mack Becomes the First Black Mayor of Laurel," *Laurel Leader-Call*, July 2, 2005; Deputy Chief Eddy Ingram, "LPD Officer Responds to Criticism," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 20, 2005.

black mayor and five black council members. Although Mack appointed more blacks than whites as department directors, whites also held important positions. A black man served as superintendent and blacks dominated the school board, but whites had a presence. Mack appointed a black police chief, but a white fire chief. During his second term, after the white fire chief retired, he appointed African American Jamie Bunch as his replacement. The appointment of the first black chief to the LFD reflected the profound transformation of the department which had only hired Bunch in 1979 under a court order to desegregate. By the time of Bunch's appointment, blacks represented close to half of the firefighters in the city. In an attempt to maintain a racial balance, Mack also selected many white directors, even appointing a white man as CAO. Councilman Wheat lauded Mack for fighting back against black pressure to remove all whites from leadership roles, but he often grew frustrated with several black council members and black community leaders as he argued that the reversal of racial power led to "a role reversal," in which some blacks sought "to do the same things that they thought were wrong 40 years ago." Racism may have motivated some blacks to demand the exclusion of whites from the governing body, but it did not motivate Mack. And some black leaders guarded their dominant rule because they distrusted that white directors would address black concerns, particularly the acute black suffering in the inner city.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Quoting Anthony Wheat, interview. Jimmy Bunch, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 14, 2010, MOHP recordings; "Close of the Decade was Definitely Newsworthy," *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 2, 2010; "Superintendent," and "Board of Trustees, Laurel School District: <http://www.laurelschools.org/education/district/district.php?sectionid=1>; Jones County Sheriff's Office: http://www.jonesso.com/page_view.php?id=7; Jones County Economic Development Authority, Demographics, <http://www.edajones.com/Demographics/demographics.html>; School Board Members and Superintendent, Jones County School District:

Less than two months after Mack took office that suffering exploded. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina rushed into the Central Piney Woods and spun tornadoes across the landscape. The destruction affected much of the citizenry, but it devastated the poor. Some citizens reacted with violence. To worsen matters, some displaced gang members from New Orleans and the Mississippi Coast settled in the Central Piney Woods. Within a year, gang wars exploded in Laurel and Hattiesburg. The violence revealed that Mississippi, like the rest of America, had yet to confront the most enduring legacy of centuries of racial oppression—the cycle of poverty, segregation, and alienation of poor blacks in the inner cities which along with the War on Drugs had produced a black “*undercaste*” and birthed a perpetuating culture of violence and despair. Former Freedom Summer student Jimella Stokes Jackson bemoaned, “The sad part of the Civil Rights Movement, we lost our children.” Jackson was referring to those black youths of the inner cities who responded to the twin struggles of racism and classism by becoming dangerous men like Antonio Page, or broken men like Darryl Robertson.⁵⁷

Until August 29, 2005, Page had resided in a dilapidated home in East Jerusalem, a decaying inner city community in the heart of black Hattiesburg. The rage that seethed inside Page most of his life erupted in the wake of Hurricane Katrina when he lost all that he had owned. He took refuge at his grandmother’s home, and he spent the following day

<http://www.jones.k12.ms.us/District/schoolboard.html>; Laurel City officials: http://www.laurelms.com/g_cityofficials.html; Jones County Board of Supervisors, <http://www.co.jones.ms.us/boardofsupervisors.php>; Dennis Kevyrn, interview. See also, interviews by Patricia Boyett, in *An Oral History of Jones County*.

⁵⁷ First quote, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 13; second quote, Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview by Patricia Boyett, January 9, 2009. “Killer Katrina’s Vicious Punch,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 2005; Bryan Livingston, “Recent Shooting Shines Light on Gang Problem,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 30, 2006.

smoking joints and drinking beer in a fruitless effort to numb the rage. Water and ice were scarce because the storm had knocked out the electricity all across southern Mississippi, and water from the tap was undrinkable. Page's sister, Cynthia, promised to secure the family ice through her ex-boyfriend, Fred Burns, who was part of Mayor Dupree's inner circle. Burns still loved Cynthia. He took good care of their daughter Jasmine, and he treated her son Justin as his own because his deadbeat father neglected him. But he usually kept a distance from her brothers because they harbored a "street" mentality that he considered destructive. Still, when she handed him ice chests and implored him to use his connections to fill them and join her family for a cookout that evening, he could not deny her request.⁵⁸

Ice was so scarce that Mayor DuPree even lacked a supply, and five days later Sheriff McGee broke federal law and became a folk hero when he commandeered two trucks from Camp Shelby and distributed ice to the citizens. When Burns arrived at Cynthia's family cookout with empty chests, Antonio Page spiraled out of control. He had always considered Burns part of that black bourgeois who looked down on men like him. Suddenly, Page rushed Burns and tried to hit him with a beer bottle. Burns pulled out his pocket knife, warned Page to step back, and ordered Justin and Jasmine to follow him out of the yard and into their truck. As he started to drive away, Page hurled the beer bottle at the driver side window—it shattered and sprayed glass shards all over Burns and his children. Enraged, Burns retrieved his pistol, got out of his truck, raised his gun, and aimed it at Page. Jasmine cried out: "Daddy, don't shoot him." When Burns hesitated,

⁵⁸ Quoting Fred Burns, interview, by Patricia Boyett, April 28, 2010, MOHP recording; "Killer Katrina's Vicious Punch," *Hattiesburg American*, August 30, 2005; Janet Braswell, "Ice Had Been in Meridian for Three Days," *Hattiesburg American*, August 31, 2005; "Grim Reality," *Hattiesburg American*, September 1, 2005.

Page charged him. Burns beat Page with the pistol until Page wrenched free and fled down the street. That night, Page returned to the cookout with a gun, but Burns had gone home. He strode toward his sister Cynthia, who was lying on a lounge chair. In front of her children, Page placed the gun to the back of Cynthia's head. He fired a bullet into his sister's brain, killing her instantly.⁵⁹

The murder devastated Burns and his children. Burns had known suffering most of his life. Because he had dedicated himself to fighting racial discrimination, white supremacists had tried to force him out of town, first with threats to his person and later by ensuring that he could not find a job in Hattiesburg commensurate with his education. So, Burns took a civil service job in the post office, and he continued to lead and participate in civil rights protests. His sacrifices had helped put a black man in the mayor's office and ensure that blacks were in charge of public schools and the police department. On August 30, 2005, Burns faced an extraordinary new challenge—he must somehow fight the black-on-black violence that by the new millennium threatened his children's future and those of so many black children. As Burns took over full custody of Jasmine and Justin, he tried to understand and address the dysfunctions in the inner city that had left his children motherless, and he fought to rescue his children from the rage that consumed their uncle who was sentenced to life in prison for murdering his sister.

⁵⁹ Quoting Fred Burns, interview June 10, 2009; "Ice Had Been in Meridian for Three Days," *Hattiesburg American*, August 31, 2005; Erin Hilsabek, "Fight Over Ice Sparks Shooting," *Hattiesburg American*, August 31, 2005; John Surratt, "Page Gets Life," *Hattiesburg American*, January 31, 2007; *Antonio Page v. State of Mississippi* (2008), case no. 2007-KA-00334-COA, Court of Appeals of the State of Mississippi, Jackson Mississippi, [hereinafter cited as *Page v. Mississippi* (2008)]; Reuben Mees, "Sheriff a Folk Hero to Many," *Hattiesburg American*, February 25, 2006. "Hero of Katrina May Be Prosecuted," *MSNBC*, March 24, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11996534/> (accessed March 2006).

Burns moved his children out of the inner city and into a middle class black neighborhood near William Carey College. He hoped that they would have different peer influences so that he could steer them away from the nightmare of the ghettos and toward the dreams of the civil rights victories that he had fought so hard to achieve.⁶⁰

In the Jones County jail, Darryl Robertson wished someone had guided him toward that better life that the Movement had imagined and the black bourgeois had claimed. Instead, when Robertson grew up in Laurel's inner city, all he had ever dreamed of becoming was a gangster. Since his mother worked all the time so she could support him and his sister after his father abandoned them, he found role models in the gangsta-rappers he watched on television, and he found a family on the streets. He learned to dress like a gang member, be promiscuous but never "love those ho's," and "keep [his] vocabulary limited." As a 10-year-old, he was already "thuggin" with his 14-year-old delinquent cousin and getting high with his 20-year-old uncle. The neighborhood drug dealer liked him, and he drove him around town in his Cadillac. Most girls he knew were reared by drug-addict mothers, who spent their nights in "the club," and taught their daughters how to entice men. Like him, most boys grew up watching their stand-in gang member fathers sell and smoke dope, and they wanted to do the same. Later, when Robertson was in jail on multiple drug charges, he wished he had been taught to see the world differently so he could have chosen a different life. Instead, he lamented, he, like

⁶⁰ Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; *Page v. Mississippi* (2008); "Page Gets Life," *Hattiesburg American*, January 31, 2007; Record of Antonio Page, MDOC #92734, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

so many children of the ghettos, were “convicted felons, pimps, gangstas and ho’s before we exit the womb.”⁶¹

Page and Robertson were part of a black *undercaste* created by economic shifts and racial and class segregation, which during the first decade of the post civil rights era, had become self-perpetuating as chronic unemployment, under education, the War on Drugs, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, absent fathers, dysfunctional homes, and gang brutality locked many impoverished blacks into a cyclical culture of anarchy and violence. Although poor whites suffered from some similar struggles, racial discrimination worsened the black condition and locked poor blacks in the decaying inner cities. At the turn of the millennium in Hattiesburg, 5 percent of whites resided in high poverty neighborhoods compared to 33.3 percent of blacks. Only 6.5 percent of white children lived in single parent homes compared to 25.7 percent of black children. The trend was similar in the state at large and, combined with the 2000 census records, suggests that Laurel’s poor blacks suffered under similar conditions. As of 2006, 38 percent of black women and 32 percent of black men in Mississippi lived below the poverty line compared to 14 percent of white women and 11 percent of white men. In part, the black underclass became self-perpetuating because many blacks lacked access to a decent education. Two years after Katrina, the black drop-out rate climbed to 28 percent in Hattiesburg and to over 20 percent in Laurel. Moreover, blacks were performing poorly

⁶¹ Quoting Darryl Robertson, “We Must Expunge the Root to Expunge the Problem,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 6, 2007. *State of Mississippi v. Daryl Robertson* (2007), case no. 2007-260-KR2, case file, Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi; Record of Darryl Robertson, MDOC #138114, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

on assessment and college entrance exams, which suggests that the system was failing even those who remained in school.⁶²

Some blacks managed to escape the ghettos but it attacked and destroyed others. The year after Katrina, a wave of gang violence exploded again across the Central Piney Woods. In 2006, Hattiesburg had over 12 drive-by shootings—up from six the previous year. During one shooting, a stray bullet injured a 12-year-old girl waiting for a school bus. The HPD arrested suspects, and Chief Wynn ordered officers to assume overtime patrols. Mayor DuPree held several community meetings, and he worked with the HPD, local leaders, school officials, and church leaders to develop comprehensive plans to quash gang activity. As city leaders struggled to understand the origins of the problems, they learned many shocking facts. Some 30 gangs existed in Hattiesburg, and they began recruiting kids in elementary schools. Children as young as seven witnessed gang fights in the schoolyard, and others saw their peers writing their names under gang lists on the bathroom walls. Sometimes they experienced peer pressure to join a gang, particularly when young members picked fights with them. Residents grew outraged by the surge in

⁶² Harvard School of Public Health, Hattiesburg, Mississippi Summary Profile, 2007-10, Diversitydata.org, website: <http://diversitydata.sph.harvard.edu/> (accessed August 2010) ; Marianne Hill, “The Economic Status of African Americans in Mississippi,” Working Paper No. 2008-01 (Jackson: Center for Policy Research and Planning Mississippi Institute of Higher Learning, February 2008), 1-4, IHL website: <http://www.ihl.state.ms.us/URC.html>; Laurel, Mississippi, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, United States Census Bureau; Editorial, “School District Needs More Support,” *Hattiesburg American*, August 6, 2009; Eloria Newell James, “Laurel Schools ‘At Risk of Failing,’” *Laurel Leader-Call*, November 23, 2009. Open Letter by Glen M. McGee, Superintendent Section and Letter to Parents, October 6, 2009, Principal Carl Michael Day, Laurel High School, Attachment in Accountability Section, both on Laurel School District website: <http://www.laurelschools.org/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectionid=1>; Laurel School District, Hattiesburg School District, Office of Research and Statistics, Mississippi Integrated Accountability and Assessment Reporting System, 2008/2009, Department of Education, <http://orsap.mde.k12.ms.us:8080/MAARS/index.jsp>.

violence and the shocking stories of the young recruits. They also grew concerned about the negative economic impact the rise in gang activity could have on their city.⁶³

Gang violence also plagued Laurel that year. The most disturbing attack occurred on Easter Sunday 2006, when Xavier Davis and Marcus Jefferson, two black athletes from Laurel High School, shot Timothy McGill in the back of the head on orders from a 26-year-old ex-convict as part of their initiation into a gang. After the murder, Mack raised funds to hire more police and create a Laurel-Jones Gang Task Force. He worked with city officials to demolish abandoned properties, and he toiled with the park and recreation crews to clear brush in vacant fields so gang members had fewer places to meet. Mack and his new black chief, Walter Martin, promised to recapture Laurel's neighborhoods from the gangs. They declared First Avenue "ground zero." Within days of the shooting, police arrested Davis and Jefferson. Likely because both gang members were juveniles, the courts allowed them to plead guilty to manslaughter charges which only carried 10-year prison sentences. The rising black-on-black crime concerned Mack, and he galvanized the community to fight "drugs, illiteracy, teen pregnancy and other factors including poor parenting [which] have contributed to a generation becoming disillusioned and misguided. . . . These are our future doctors and leaders who will be

⁶³ Kelly Brown, "Gang Violence Injures One," *Hattiesburg American*, October 9, 2006; Reuben Mees, "Officials Discuss School Violence," *Hattiesburg American*, October 12, 2006; Reuben Mees, "Dangerous Influence Begins Early," *Hattiesburg American*, October 22, 2006; "Gang Activity in Hattiesburg," *Hattiesburg American*, October 22, 2006; Reuben Mees, "Violence May Scare Off Business," *Hattiesburg American*, October 11, 2006.

making decisions for us later on. We've got to turn this around. It would be a terrible thing to lose after all the African-Americans have gone through.”⁶⁴

Mack considered education vital to rescuing the youth from the despair and disillusionment that led some teenagers and children to join gangs. Thus, he fought to improve public education in Laurel, but the re-segregated system placed many obstacles in his path. During the 2007/2008 school year, 2,627 blacks and 208 whites attended Laurel schools compared to 1,752 blacks and 6,047 whites in the Jones County schools. The virtual re-segregation of Laurel schools led to a racial divide over school funding. Since 2004, the city council had supported a school bond referendum to complete rebuilding of a middle school and massive renovations and technological improvement in six of its nine schools. Blacks supported the bond because most of them sent their children to the city schools. Whites opposed it because most of them either did not have school-aged children, or they sent them to private academies. During these hostile debates, some people reintroduced the prospect of consolidation. However, the wounds of old battles had yet to heal, and consolidation could simply not occur in such a racially fragile landscape. One Jones County citizen pointed out that blacks and whites had basically developed their own territories and hoped that they would remain separate. They had no interest in conceding their power, changing the racial composition of their

⁶⁴ First and second quotes, Nikki Davis Maute, “Laurel Fights Back,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 23, 2006; last quote, Brian Livingston, “Dare to Dream,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 20, 2006. Bryan Livingston, “Recent Shooting Shines Light on Gang Problem,” *Laurel Leader-Call*, April 30, 2006; “Laurel on Right Track to Fight Crime,” *Hattiesburg American*, July 24, 2006. *State of Mississippi v. Xavier Davis* (2006), case no. 2006-066-KR2A, case file; *State of Mississippi v. Marcus Jefferson* (2006), case no. 2006-066-KR2B, case file, both in Circuit Court, Laurel, Mississippi. Melvin Mack, interview, 679; Record of Xavier Davis, MDOC #138393, Mississippi Department of Corrections, Parchman.

divided landscapes, or paying to fund each other's schools. Finally, in 2008, the black majority turned out to vote and passed a \$26 million bond.⁶⁵

The following year, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled against the city's annexation plans. The 11 year battle initiated by Susan Vincent—and to the chagrin of many whites taken up by Mayor Mack—had failed because of racial divisiveness. Without annexation, Laurel would continue to suffer economically. Blacks and whites had carved out their separate political domains and their separate schools, and they could not overcome race even at the expense of the city's economic health. By the close of 2008, the Jones County citizenry had embraced the easing of racial hostilities that came with the acceptance of their divided racial terrains. As blacks dominated Laurel, and whites the county, there was little territory left to contest. During the 2009 elections, blacks retained the mayor's office and five of the seven council seats. No whites had bothered to run against them.⁶⁶

It took longer for Hattiesburg to achieve a racial détente. After the spike in gang

⁶⁵ Enrollment by Grade/Race/Gender 2007/2008, Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System, Office of Research and Statistics, Mississippi Department of Education <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/ORS/DAADF.htm>; Lawrence "Ronnie" Clark, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 28, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, vol. 792,161-162, MOHP. Sylvia Regina Walters, "Citizens Continue to Debate School Bond Issue," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 25, 2003; "The School Bond Issue," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 12, 2003; "Find Another Solution," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 24, 2003; "Laurel High School Students Express Views on Bond Issue," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 25, 2003; "Bond Issue Falls with 59.7 Percent," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 2, 2003; "Districts Should Merge," *Laurel Leader-Call*, May 30, 2005; "Some Say Yea, Some Nay, on School Bond Issue," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 22, 2004; "Breakdown of Bond Votes by Ward," *Laurel Leader-Call*, September 30, 2004; "Racially Charged Voting," *Laurel Leader-Call*, October 17, 2004; "Group Wants Vote on Latest Bond Issue," *Laurel Leader-Call*, February 14, 2008; Susan Vincent, interview.

⁶⁶ *Laurel v. Shady Grove* (2009), case no. 2007-AN-01547-SCT; Susan Vincent, interview.

violence, Hattiesburg remained fraught with racial divisiveness as Mayor DuPree struggled with his deteriorating police department. But changes were emerging. Fairley called on the black community to look inward for solutions as he noted: “so many times we like to blame other races, but this is black-on-black crime. We have to hold black men accountable.” He hosted a meeting with gang leaders and later initiated a gang rehabilitation program. The dialogue provided the city with an important forum to develop a myriad of methods for reducing gang activity over the long term. In the short term, increased patrols caused a 45 percent decrease in crime. Still, the overall crime rate in 2006 had risen by 25 percent and homicides more than doubled. The year came to a bloody close with two inner-city murders in December. Criticism of Wynn exploded again, but the chief ended the debate over his leadership on February 20, 2007 when he resigned his position.⁶⁷

Despite Wynn’s departure, racial controversies continued to plague the council, and several of them centered on a new white council member, Dave Ware. In August 2006, after Red Bailey fell ill and retired, Ware won the vacated seat in a special election. Ware had more experience with persons outside of his race than his colleagues, which he hoped would help him cultivate relationships with blacks in his ward and with African Americans on the council. Born in 1971 on a farm in Mize, Mississippi, Ware was the youngest person on the council. He grew up in the post-civil rights era and attended

⁶⁷ Quoting Reuben Mees, “Dangerous Influence Begins Early,” *Hattiesburg American*, October 22, 2006. John Surratt, “Crime up 25% in 2006,” *Hattiesburg American*. January 17, 2007; John Surratt, “2006-A Look Back 2007-A Look Forward,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 31, 2006; Reuben Mees, “Mayor Supports Police Chief,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 21, 2007; “Most Recent Resignations a Telling Sign,” *Hattiesburg American*, March 18, 2007; Reuben Mees, “Hunt Starts for Chief,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 21, 2007, Hattiesburg Police Vertical File, McCain, USM.

integrated public schools. During the 1990s, he received his bachelor's degree in nursing at USM and a master's degree in nursing anesthesiology at Xavier University, a historically black college in New Orleans. In 1998 Ware opened a nurse anesthesiologist business in Hattiesburg. He and his wife sent their four children to Sacred Heart, the integrated Catholic school, and he and his family attended the integrated church. Ware hoped he could draw on his multiracial experiences to soothe racial tensions on the council.⁶⁸ His hopes notwithstanding, Ware took center stage in two racial divides.

The first division emerged over DuPree's new appointee for chief of police. One Saturday morning, as DuPree and his inner circle met to discuss candidates, someone stressed that if they replaced a black chief with a white chief, they would advance the racial polarization of the city. DuPree responded that he would select the best applicant regardless of race. If they wanted a black chief, they better deliver to him an extremely qualified candidate. They brought him Frazier Bolton, the brother of Forrest County Jail Chief Charles Bolton. Frazier, the son of a pulp wood worker, was a likeable person who had risen from poverty to build a stellar career. The eight Bolton children hailed from Richton, a small town 24 miles northeast of Hattiesburg. They grew up during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, but none of them joined the struggle. Still, it had an impact on them. Several of them studied under Ellie Dahmer who taught in Richton, and the Klan murder of her husband frightened them. The mistreatment of blacks by white law enforcement officers disturbed Frazier Bolton, and he noticed that he had never seen a lawman with black skin. His observations inspired him to pursue a career in law enforcement. As he came of age at the height of the Movement and began his law

⁶⁸ David Ware, interview; Reuben Mees, "Bailey's Exit," *Hattiesburg American*, July 12, 2006; "Ware Faces Big Workload," *Hattiesburg American*, August 31, 2006.

enforcement career in Atlanta, he dreamed of becoming Chief of Police in Hattiesburg. While Bolton attended Moorehouse College on a full academic scholarship, he worked at the Atlanta Police Department. By the time he retired from the department with 31 years of service, he had two undergraduate degrees in criminal justice and business administration and a master's degree in public administration. After his retirement, he served for over four years as Chief of Police at Jackson State University, two years as Chief of Police at Fort Valley State University, and two years as Chief of Public Safety at the Georgia World Congress Center.⁶⁹

Although the white councilmen found Bolton impressive, they worried that a new chief might destabilize the department. Ware and Carroll had grown fond of the white Acting Chief Frank Misenhelter because he had restored peace to the department and brought back to the force many officers who had left under Wynn. In hopes of preempting another public racial battle over the HPD, Ware contacted Bolton and asked him if he would withdraw his application if he learned that he lacked the majority vote necessary for confirmation. Bolton agreed. A week later, Ware contacted Bolton and informed him that he lacked the votes. Charles Bolton, however, convinced his brother to wait before he withdrew his candidacy because he had learned that powerful whites in the community were still trying to sway the white council members to vote in his favor. Ware considered Bolton's refusal to withdraw his name a violation of their agreement, and he informed reporters that he would not vote for a man who broke his word. Yet Bolton

⁶⁹ Charles Bolton, interview; Frazier Bolton, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 6, 2009, MOHP recording. Frazier Bolton's Biography, Office of the Chief of Police, Police Department, Official Website for the City of Hattiesburg: <http://www.hattiesburgms.com/police/police.html>; Johnny DuPree, interview; Billy McGee, interview.

perceived the situation differently. He considered Ware's calculations that he would lose the confirmation vote incorrect because the political game behind the scenes had yet to conclude. So, he decided to wait and find out if the political winds would deliver him his dream job. Soon afterward, Bradley and Carroll stated publicly that they stood with Ware.⁷⁰

Still, Bolton had support from some of the city's white power players—the group of men Burns and Reverend Fairley had once called the Star Chamber. Many of these whites, particularly James Dukes, had known and admired the Bolton family for years. Hundreds of people attended the public meeting in mid-October 2007 over the confirmation debate. After many powerful whites spoke on Bolton's behalf, Dukes rose and declared: "I'm white and I [am] speaking on the behalf of a black to fulfill the position of the chief of police and my feelings in that regard [go] all the way back to the Dahmer case You should judge a person by who they are and not by the color of their skin." According to Fairley, Dukes moved the spectators because "he's a star chamber guy," and as everyone knew, he "carries a big stick . . . He has favor with the judges and with law enforcement. And most times when you hire Dukes you don't lose. So people have that kind of understanding." Although Ware held out and voted against Bolton, Bradley and Carroll joined Denard and Naylor in confirming him. Bradley and Carroll worried about their decision as many of their constituents were furious that they had changed their minds. However, they soon realized that their vote of support proved to

⁷⁰ "Bradley: Race Issue Hurts City," *Hattiesburg American*, November 1, 2007; "A Power Divide Threatens our City," *Hattiesburg American*, October 15, 2007; Reuben Mees, "Bradley Explains his Vote," *Hattiesburg American*, October 18, 2007; City Council Meeting, October 16, 2007, *Hattiesburg, City Hall Minutes*, vol. 2007-6, 704-705; David Ware, interview; Carter Carroll, interview; Billy McGee, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Frazier Bolton, interview.

be one of their wisest decisions.⁷¹

Still, breaches among the races persisted as the council lawsuit against the mayor and the issue of Commodore's appointment and Progress Hattiesburg remained points of contention. On October 25, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled against DuPree and ordered him to present immediately his appointed department directors to the city council for their vote. In early 2008, Commodore resigned from her position. Soon afterward, the three white councilmen voted against the appointment of Donald Browne to Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and then they voted to eradicate the position altogether. In March of 2008, Ware became the center of another major racial divide when he was the sole holdout against the passage of DuPree's Progress Hattiesburg program that would repair streets, sidewalks, and sewer systems in traditionally black neighborhoods. Ware opposed the project because, as a fiscal conservative, he considered the sales tax that would fund it an unreasonable burden on the residents, and he argued that the council could include it in the budget instead with a more shrewd setting of city priorities. Since the Mississippi legislature had to approve the proposal before the city could send it to the citizens for a vote, Ware convinced enough members on the state senate finance committee to block the measure.⁷²

⁷¹ First quote, James K. Dukes, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 12, 2010, MOHP recording; second quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; third quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009. Henry Naylor, interview; Carter Carroll, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Kimberly Bradley, interview; Reuben Mees, "Bradley Explains his Vote," *Hattiesburg American*, October 18, 2007; *City of Hattiesburg, City Hall Minute Book*, vol. 2007-6, October 16, 2007, 704-705.

⁷² Reuben Mees, "Mayor Wrong, Court Says," *Hattiesburg American*, October 26, 2007; Reuben Mees, "Resignation Won't Stop Lawsuit," *Hattiesburg American*, February 21, 2007, Hattiesburg Government Vertical File, McCain, USM; Terry L. Jones, "DuPree to Take Over as CAO," *Hattiesburg American*, February 17, 2008;

In April 2008, the council became mired in another great battle for decisive political control over the city when Reverend Fairley, Fred Burns, and Clarence Magee, accused the city of violating the Voting Rights act by diluting the black vote in its redistricting plan. They took their case to U. S. District Court. According to the plaintiffs, the white city leaders included 3,000 transient white students in the configuration for districting so that whites would remain the majority population. If the city excluded the students from its racial demographics, the black population would climb to 55 percent, forcing the council to create three black wards. Such a development would concern whites in a town where the black mayor often bent his ear to black concerns while ignoring white frustrations. Conversely, a decision against the plaintiffs would worry blacks because white council members prevented the realization of many policies that advanced black interests. On August 7 2008, Judge Keith Starrett ruled in favor of the defendants. Although Judge Starrett conceded that the city had suffered from a history of racial discrimination and that the races tended to still vote in racial blocs, he concluded that the black voice was well represented as two blacks served on the council, and the whole city had twice elected a black mayor. The plaintiffs appealed, but they lost. The decision helped Hattiesburg because it maintained a racial balance of power and forced whites and blacks to seek reconciliation for the sake of the city.⁷³

Editorial "Council was Wrong to Vote Down CAO," *Hattiesburg American*, February 13, 2008; Emma James, "DuPree: Hattiesburg Progress Needed," *Hattiesburg American*, March 8, 2008; Terry L. Jones, "Mayor Sticks by Plan," *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 2008; Dave Ware, interview.

⁷³ Order, *Reverend Kenneth E. Fairley, Sr. et al. v. Hattiesburg, Mississippi et al.* (2006), case no. 2:06-cv-00167-KS-MTP, 18, United States District Court, Southern District of Mississippi, Hattiesburg Division, [hereinafter cited as *Fairley v. Hattiesburg* (2006)]; Complaint, Answer, Trial Brief Plaintiffs Supplemental Proposed Findings of

More than three decades earlier, in 1977, blacks in Hattiesburg had initiated a lawsuit to obtain shared political power. During the post-civil rights struggle, blacks fought too for racial justice and equal opportunities in education, employment, and in their living conditions. By 2008 they had achieved equal political power and impressive advances in racial justice, and the black middle class had made substantial socioeconomic gains. Unfortunately, the political power was equal, but not cooperative. Moreover, massive economic inequity persisted, most visibly in the inner cities where poor blacks languished. Yet change was on the horizon because the seven years of constant racial wars had taught the council members and the mayor that a city divided could not flourish. Over the next two years, leaders in Forrest County struggled to tackle the suffering of the inner cities and the racial breaches with imaginative initiatives. Their efforts toward building a cooperative biracial government and fostering racial reconciliation illuminated a road toward a state of racial peace. The leadership of Chief Frazier Bolton helped spur the new journey.

By the fall of 2008, Chief Bolton's amicable but just governing style had quelled the racial storms in the HPD that had haunted the department since the Movement years. During his first six months, Bolton worked days at HPD headquarters, and at nights he worked on street patrols to observe officers' interactions with the citizenry. Bolton attacked crime without resorting to police harassment by building on Chief Wayne Landers' Neighborhood Enhancement Teams. He used strike forces to saturate high-

Facts and Conclusion of Law, and Hattiesburg's Post Trial Brief, *Fairley. v. Hattiesburg* (2006); Terry L. Jones, "City Ward Trial Begins," *Hattiesburg American*, April 8, 2008; Terry L. Jones, "Testimony Supports Residents' Criticism," *Hattiesburg American*, April 9, 2008; Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009; *Kenneth E. Fairley, et al. v. the City of Hattiesburg* (2009) case no. 08-60942, United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit Court, New Orleans, Louisiana.

crime areas and disrupt drug rings and gangs, but he also developed a series of new community policing programs to facilitate trust and channel the youth away from criminal enterprises. To prevent racial discrimination within the HPD, Bolton implemented a rule-of-three—officers with the three highest scores on advancement exams were placed into a pool, and he weighed their job performance and their seniority with their scores to determine promotions. In an effort to prevent both police brutality and false complaints, Bolton acquired funding to install devices on his entire HPD fleet that recorded police interactions with citizens. Complaints still surfaced, but Bolton tried to deal with them as fairly as possible. The racial battles had helped the HPD change, for the purging under Wynn allowed Bolton to rebuild a functioning biracial department.⁷⁴

Ultimately, the racial battles in governing also served as a cleansing force for the city as DuPree had destroyed the old order. After years of conflict, DuPree and the council began to construct a cooperative biracial government by transforming their leadership styles. Carroll compared the struggle to “puberty,” and he noted that the city leaders had survived the “growing pains” and moved through the rite of passage as they developed a new racial consciousness. Council members began to debate their differences openly and sought to compromise. Mayor DuPree developed more cooperative relationships with white city leaders, and they responded in kind. Sheriff McGee and Charlie Sims emphasized that DuPree had discovered how to balance the needs of the long neglected black community with the needs of the city as a whole. When DuPree first

⁷⁴ Frazier Bolton, interview; Earlesha Butler, “Hattiesburg Police See Boost in Funding,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 28, 2008; Earlesha Butler, “Frazier Bolton: A Year of Progress,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 2008; Editorial, “Bolton’s First Year is a Good Start,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 2008; Billy McGee, interview; Kenneth Fairley, interviews, May 8 and 13, 2009; Carter Carroll, interview; Nathan Jordan, interview; Lillie Jackson Easton and Carolyn Preyor, interview.

took office, he had promised: “I am the mayor for the city of Hattiesburg. I am not the mayor for black folks or the mayor for white folks.” Toward the end of his second term, many citizens believed him. The reconciliation in city hall helped spur racial reconciliation in the city. The divisiveness that had plagued the city diminished to the point that the 2009 elections were bereft of racial tensions. In June the voters returned all the council members and Mayor DuPree to office. Although the city leadership had yet to create a racial utopia, they had at least formed a functioning biracial government.⁷⁵

The unprecedented racial calm in Hattiesburg paved the way for Johnny DuPree, his inner circle, and black community leaders to focus some of their efforts on lifting up impoverished black communities left behind by the Civil Rights Movement and post civil rights struggles. As many scholars had noted over the years, the crisis in the inner cities across the nation would continue as long as the governing bodies focused on containing the symptoms rather than treating the pathology that created it. Adam Fairclough argues in *Better Day Coming* that the federal government was unlikely to launch a “Third Reconstruction” to address social ills. Nevertheless, municipalities have some power to address that suffering, and Hattiesburg made some strides in that arena. DuPree never relinquished his dreams for Progress Hattiesburg, and in April 2008 he was awarded a \$9 million community development bloc grant for the program. Councilwoman Denard created the Twin Forks Rising project, sponsored in part by donations, to revive the decaying black communities of Mobile-Bouie, East Jerusalem, and the Katy-John-Dabs. DuPree also worked with leaders to address comprehensively the crisis in the Hattiesburg

⁷⁵ Last quote, Johnny DuPree, interview; all other quotes, Carter Carroll, interview. Dave Ware, interview; Billy McGee, interview; Charlie Sims, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Henry Naylor, interview; Earlesha Butler, “Frazier Bolton: A Year of Progress,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 2008.

schools. When he appointed Fred Burns to fill a new vacancy on the school board, Burns found himself traveling “full circle” to where his activism had begun with Operation Children First.⁷⁶

Great changes had also occurred on the judicial front that had the power to radically change the suffering of the inner cities caused by drug addiction, drug dealing, and the War on Drugs. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander argues that the suffering of the inner city will never end until whites and blacks join in a common cause to terminate the War on Drugs that has functioned as a system of racial control by massively incarcerating blacks. She contends that to end the War on Drugs, America must accept a radical restructuring of its society. The Supreme Court and Congress must restore civil rights and liberties by undoing its bulwark of legislation and court rulings that sustained and funded the war. The culture of law enforcement must transform from a militant mentality in which officers act like soldiers occupying a war zone to protectors and builders of broken communities. Marijuana and perhaps other drugs should be legalized. Authorities need to approach drug abuse as a disease to be treated in medical facilities.⁷⁷ Hattiesburg had, as noted, made some of these changes including a shift in the culture of law enforcement. Another great change had been taking place on the judicial

⁷⁶ First quote, David Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 335; second quote, Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009. Fred Burns, interview, April 28, 2010; Johnny DuPree, interview; Deborah Denard-Delgado, interview; Terry L. Jones, “Project Needs Funds to Thrive,” *Hattiesburg American*, February 26, 2007; Terry L. Jones, “Hattiesburg gets \$9 million,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 16, 2008. For list of board members, see, HPSD Board of Trustees:
http://www.hpsd.k12.ms.us/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=59

⁷⁷ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 220-224, 242-248.

front for much of the new millennium.

In 2003 Judge Robert Helfrich initiated a social jurisprudence approach to stem the rising tide of drug abuse and drug related crimes in Forrest and Perry counties by establishing a Drug Court rehabilitation program for nonviolent offenders. Although the Drug Court was not specifically formulated to address inner city problems as it included persons of all races and classes; it had a positive affect on many inner city residents brought into the program. The Drug Court offered offenders an alternative to prison as the program treated the “disease of addiction” in “a cooperative courtroom atmosphere [where] the judge heads a team of court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, and treatment counselors all working in concert to support and monitor a participant's recovery.” The original Drug Court idea emerged in Florida as a grassroots struggle in response to the rising incarceration of drug offenders and the failure of prison to rehabilitate drug addicts. In 1989 the Eleventh Circuit Court in Miami, Florida opened the first drug court, and soon the movement spread across the United States. In 1995, Judge Keith Starrett founded the first felony Drug Court in Mississippi. In October 2003, Judge Helfrich opened the first Drug Court for the Twelfth Circuit Court in Forrest and Perry counties.⁷⁸

The demographics of the Drug Court suggested that whites abused drugs more than minorities and that the poor and working class used drugs more than members of middle or upper classes. The statistics revealed that whites used harder drugs than blacks.

⁷⁸ Quoting “What Are Drug Courts?” and Drug Court Movement in Mississippi, both in <http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/trialcourts/drugcourt/drugcourt.html>. Billy McGee, interview; Robert Helfrich, interview, May 4, 2009; Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, Miami Dade County Drug Court, http://www.jud11.flcourts.org/programs_and_services/drug_court.htm (accessed March 2010).

As of April 2006, whites comprised 57.3 percent and minorities 42.7 percent of the participants. Marijuana was the predominant drug of choice among all races of participants with 83.3 percent of whites admitting marijuana use and 75 percent of minorities. Alcohol was the second drug of choice: 72.9 whites and 52.3 minorities abused it. Cocaine in various forms was the third most used drug with 69.5 percent of whites 50 percent abusing it. Whites were by far the predominant abusers of Methamphetamines at a rate of 61 to 2.3 percent and of prescription drugs at a rate of 47.5 to 4.6 percent. Heroin use was minimal among all participants. Although the participants in Drug Court came from various social classes, the majority of them were single, poor, and undereducated. Only 13 percent of the participants were married. Over a third of the participants had not graduated high school. Nineteen percent had some college education, but only one percent had earned a bachelor's degree. Sixty-two percent of the participants were unemployed. Judge Helfrich and Sheriff Billy McGee, who worked closely with the program, found that most of the participants suffered from a lack of self worth.⁷⁹

To complete the program in Forrest and Perry counties, participants had to matriculate through a rehabilitation program. They entered a twelve-step recovery program and attended weekly meetings. Some participants were sent to in-patient drug

⁷⁹ Robert Helfrich, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 4, 2009; Lisa S. Nored, Sheri Jenkins, Ragan A. Downey, *Therapeutic Jurisprudence: An Examination of Mississippi Drug Courts* (The University of Southern Mississippi Department of Administration of Justice, Mississippi Statistical Analysis Center, Drug Court Evaluation, 2009) 17-21, State of Mississippi Judiciary Office of Courts. "Drug Court 2009 Conference Brochure"; "Drug Court Fiscal Policy"; "Drug Court Law"; Mississippi Judiciary Office of Courts. "Drug Court Mississippi Programs"; "Drug Court Movement in Mississippi"; "Key Components of Drug Courts"; "Drug Court rules"; "What Are Drug Courts?" all in, <http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/trialcourts/drugcourt/drugcourt.html>.

addiction facilities for several months. Every Monday, all participants gathered before Judge Helfrich to present their progress or lack thereof and to discuss their triumphs and travails in their personal lives. They also met with the judge in smaller groups once a month. To ensure that participants maintained their sobriety, court officials randomly tested them for drug use. Participants who tested positive for drug use suffered various consequences that included short term imprisonment in the local jail. Repetitive positive drug tests sometimes resulted in a participant's termination from the program and imprisonment. The Drug Court held public graduation ceremonies for participants who completed the program. Judge Helfrich considered the graduation ceremonies an important element of the program as it celebrated graduates for overcoming great obstacles to confront their addiction and change their lives.⁸⁰

For Judge Helfrich, the program became a crusade as he found that “if you send an addict to jail, when they're released they're still an addict - and they're a better criminal. . . . You're not addressing the problem, which is the addiction. . . . If their criminal behavior is linked to an addiction, if you cure the addiction, you cure that behavior.” Drug Court also brought structure and order to the lives of addicts as the program not only tackled the addiction, but helped participants rebuild their lives, find jobs, complete high school, attend college or work training programs, and improve their relationship with their families. Judge Helfrich went far beyond many other Drug Courts across the nation. He developed a Drug Court softball team that included the recovering addicts and their probation officers, law enforcement officers, and court officials. No one

⁸⁰ Earlesha Bulter, “Drug Court Graduates Get a New Start,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 16, 2009, Ed Kemp, “A Lifesaver for Many,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 17, 2009, Rachel Leifer, “Drug Court Participants Set To Graduate Today,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 11, 2009.

was required to participate, but quite a few embraced the opportunity. The judge did require participants to take part in various community projects as he hoped it would inculcate in them a sense of personal responsibility to uplift the community. For many participants, the Drug Court officials became their life line and their family. During Drug Court sessions, participants often proudly presented to the judge the chips they earned for sobriety through their Alcohol and Drug anonymous programs. It also brought addicts together to share their stories which terminated the “isolation” that kept them locked in a cycle of addiction. Most important, it engendered in participants a sense of self-worth and “hope” for the future. One participant noted, “when I didn't think I could do it, they said I can . . . they had hope for me when nobody else did.” Another participant emphasized: “we all have lives now [because Helfrich] believed in us when we couldn't believe in ourselves.” Many graduates of Drug Court formed alumni groups that met regularly. Some of them also continued to attend Drug Court sessions voluntarily. Many local employers eagerly hired participants and graduates of Drug Court, in part, because they knew they could contact Judge Helfrich if they had a problem with the employee.⁸¹

The Drug Court cost taxpayers considerably less than incarceration at \$1,500 a year per program participant compared to \$16,000 to \$17,000 a year per prisoner. It also greatly reduced recidivism. On a national level in 2004, 67 percent of drug addicts who were incarcerated were repeat offenders while only 16 percent of Drug Court graduates

⁸¹ First quote, Robert Helfrich, interview by Patricia Boyett, May 4, 2009; rest of quotes, Rachel Leifer, “Drug Court Participants Set to Graduate,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 11, 2006. Janet Braswell, “Woman Says Drug Court Saves Lives,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 21, 2005; Nancy Kaffer, “15 Graduate from Drug Court,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 12, 2008; Nored, Jenkins, Downey, *Therapeutic Jurisprudence: An Examination of Mississippi Drug Courts*; Billy McGee, interview; Janet Braswell, “Women Says Drug Court Saves Lives,” *Hattiesburg American*, May 21, 2005; Author's Observations, Drug Court, May 4, 2009, May 11, 2009; June 8, 2009.

became recidivists. In Forrest and Perry counties, as of 2006, 63 of the 103 participants in the Drug Court were still active; 6 had graduated; 22 were terminated; and 12 had either voluntarily terminated their participation or could not be located. As the program continued over the next few years, the number of participants and graduation rates increased. The Drug Court touched the lives of many families in Hattiesburg including that of Mayor Johnny DuPree. His brother Samuel had been addicted to crack cocaine for 14 years. His habit proved so devastating that Mayor DuPree refused to allow him to visit his home. Finally, Samuel and his wife Valerie became Drug Court participants and began repairing their relationship with the mayor and their families. In November 2008, Samuel DuPree and his wife Valerie graduated from Drug Court and embraced a life of sobriety. White politicians also praised Drug Court. Councilman Carroll argued it transformed drug addicts into “viable members of the community.”⁸²

The program proved so successful that in 2007, Judge Mike McPhail started a Juvenile Drug Court. Each participant had to complete four phases and maintain their sobriety; they also had weekly meetings and random drug tests. In addition, they had a strict curfew that they were required to obey. As of January 2010, seven juveniles had graduated the court and 26 youths were in the program. During a graduation ceremony of two participants, Judge McPhail praised the graduates for their hard work and perseverance. One of the drug court counselors, Professor W. Jeff Hinton, told the young graduates: “Your accomplishments here have given you a second chance at life. . . what

⁸² Quoting Carter Carroll, interview; Nored, Jenkins, Downey, *Therapeutic Jurisprudence: An Examination of Mississippi Drug Courts* 17; Earlesha Butler, “10 Graduate From Drug Court,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 4, 2008; Rachel Leifer, “Drug Court Participants Set to Graduate,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 11, 2006; Robert Helfrich, interview, May 4, 2009.

you've learned here is how to live.” Hinton also called on them to persevere in the struggle to maintain sobriety that they would continue to face: “Tomorrow is where the real work starts. Tomorrow is the first day of your life.”⁸³

Neither the adult or juvenile drug courts were created to specifically address issues of the inner city or to reconcile the races. Yet both courts had a positive impact in both areas. Participants as well as the judge, the law enforcement officers, probation officers, the drug program coordinators, and the staff spanned the racial spectrum. Thus, the Drug Courts brought people together of various races in a cooperative atmosphere to address a common human struggle. It also proved that social jurisprudence had the power to successfully treat social pathologies. The Hattiesburg Police Department and the Sheriff’s Department worked successfully with the court officials to address the problems of drugs throughout Forrest County. The Drug Court could not resolve all the problems with the War on Drugs, and as scholar Michelle Alexander suggests, perhaps only a massive grassroots movement could force radical political, economic, and judicial changes. Such a movement could begin in a town like Hattiesburg where many strong black and white leaders have discussed the prospect of implementing a bottom-up approach to the inner-city crisis by launching a Third Movement.

The desire for a new movement thrived among veteran activists. Jimella Stokes Jackson emphasized that “we have so much to fight now.” Several community leaders had fostered important programs to ease the suffering in the inner cities that at some point might grow into a Third Movement. Since the late 1980s Reverend Siggers had recruited thousands of inner city children into his church, and he built outreach ministries and

⁸³ “Two Juveniles Graduate From Drug Court,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 26, 2010.

rehabilitative and social service groups. NAACP leader Nathan Jordan continually tried to expand the NAACP Youth chapter because, as he noted, “Children train other children.” Former Freedom Summer student Glenda Funchess developed a civil rights summer program for black teenagers as she hoped to replace the self-hatred that plagued too many black youths with self-love by teaching them the history of black courage and pride. Burns and Woullard participated in volunteer sports programs for the youth in which they used sports to guide children to examine life like they examined the game—to think about it critically. If they could practice and improve their game and overcome obstacles to win, then they could achieve the same successes in their personal lives. Fairley also saw sports as a significant venue for reaching black children. He worked with Dave Ware to rebuild a sports complex for both the students at Sacred Heart, where Ware’s children attended school, and for the students at Alpha Christian School, Fairley’s private academy. The cooperation between Fairley and Ware to build a sportsplex used by children of all races proved a promising step toward racial reconciliation in the city.⁸⁴

As 2008 wound toward its close, great national racial shifts in the political milieu also heartened many black activists. On November 4, 2008, veteran civil rights activists in the Central Piney Woods watched in awe the triumph their struggle had produced when news reporters announced that Barack Obama, son of a black father and a white mother, had won the election and would become the forty-fourth President of the United States of America. Few of them ever imagined that they would live to witness the

⁸⁴ First quote, Jimella Stokes Jackson, interview; second quote, Nathan Jordan, interview. Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 8, 2009; Fred Burns, interview, June 10, 2009; Rod Woullard, interview; David Ware, interview; Eddie Holloway, interview; Glenda Funchess, interview. Arthur Siggers, interview by Patricia Boyett, June 10, 2009, MOHP recording.

election of a president born of a relationship over which white men had lynched so many black men. Vernon Dahmer's widow, Ellie, considered Obama's victory proof that "America has changed." Jimella Stokes Jackson dug through her civil rights memorabilia and found a photograph of Gwen Merritt, Valerie Abrams, and herself standing in the rain on the picket line on Freedom Day, January 22, 1964. She sent copies of it to her old friends with a letter, declaring: "This was your first personal contribution to Barack's presidency." Lula Cooley, who in 1985 became the first black woman on the Laurel City Council, entered city hall and shouted, "My president won." On January 20, 2009, as Reverend Kenneth Fairley gathered with massive crowds on the Washington mall and witnessed Obama become the first African American President of the United States of America, he raised his eyes to the clear winter sky and whispered to the heavens: "Daddy the field of play has been leveled." For a stunning moment, blacks across America believed that a new day of jubilee had arrived.⁸⁵

On a local political level, blacks also had reason to celebrate. On the eve of Obama's inauguration, African Americans enjoyed more political power in Laurel and Hattiesburg than at any time in their history. Black mayors ran both towns, blacks held most of the top positions at city hall, and black chiefs ran both police departments. On the surface, the inauguration of President Obama and the substantial political power blacks enjoyed in places like Mississippi seemed to signal that America had overcome its racist past but that proved overly optimistic. Over 12 years earlier, University of Southern Mississippi Professor Neil McMillen had argued that "the unfinished part of the

⁸⁵ First quote, Terry Jones, "How Blacks See Obama's Victory," *Hattiesburg American*, November 9, 2009; second quote, Jimella Stokes, interview; third quote, Lula Cooley, interview; fourth quote, Kenneth Fairley, interview, May 13, 2009.

revolution is the desegregation of the American heart and the full integration of the African American into economic well-being.” Although progress had occurred on both fronts during the new millennium, a post racial world still eluded the state just as it eluded the nation.⁸⁶

On the economic front, the recession that engulfed America in mid-2008, hit African Americans the hardest and forced more blacks into the underclass. Moreover, the rise of a black man to the highest office in the free world instigated a racial backlash across the country as white supremacist and anti-federal government organizations sprang to the surface. The Central Piney Woods had not experienced a Klan killing in decades, but white supremacist groups had not disappeared. As of 2007, Mississippi had 26 known white supremacist organizations. Former Freedom Summer student Carolyn Preyor, a black teacher in the Forrest County district, was told often by many of her white students that their fathers were Klan members; some even warned her never to come to their homes to discuss their scholastic problems because their Klan fathers would kill her. A white employee at a local business in Laurel expressed a similar sentiment when asked if he planned to celebrate Martin Luther King Day. The employee, who failed to realize that the holiday celebrated King’s birthday not the anniversary of his death, retorted loudly: “I’m always happy to celebrate the killing of any n[igger].”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Quoting Jerry Mitchell, “We’re Still a Long Way from Dream,” *Hattiesburg American*, April 4, 1993, Race Relations Vertical File, McCain, USM; Susan Vincent, interview; Anthony Wheat, interview; City Council page, Official Website for the City of Hattiesburg <http://www.hattiesburgms.com/council/council.html>.

⁸⁷ Quoting Cal Callen, Letter to the Editor, *Laurel Leader-Call*, January 19, 2010. Carolyn Preyor, interview. Mark Potok, “They Say They Want a Revolution,” and Mark Potok, “Rage on the Right: The Year in Hate and Extremism,” *Intelligence Report*, 137 (Spring 2010), Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://www.splcenter.org/>; “Active U. S.

At the least, the violent white supremacists languished in the fringes of the Central Piney Woods. Forrest County had achieved important victories for racial justice in the courtrooms, and those transformations continued and laid the foundations for racial reconciliation. In September 2010, Judge Helfrich agreed to reexamine a 1979 case that had sent three black men, Larry Ruffin, Philip Bivens, and Bobby Ray Dixon, to prison for life for the rape and murder of a white woman, Eva Gail Patterson. Hattiesburg police had used threats and beatings to coerce false confessions from the three men, but later all of them insisted they were innocent. Ruffin died in prison in 2002, still proclaiming his innocence. In early September 2010, the Innocence Project attorneys presented DNA to the district court that proved that another man already imprisoned for another rape was the guilty party in the Patterson case. On September 16, Judge Helfrich exonerated Bivens and Dixon. Like the Bowers conviction and Kennard's exoneration, this case advanced racial reconciliation and furthered the journey toward redemption.⁸⁸

Certainly, the racial landscape in the Central Piney Woods was still fragile, and tenuous racial bonds were easily frayed. Some residents considered racial reconciliation

Hate Groups in 2007" Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp>; "Urban League Shares State of Black America," March 24, 2010, UPI.com (accessed August 2010).

⁸⁸ *State of Mississippi v. Bobby Ray Dixon and Larry Ruffin* (1979), case no. 248/9380; *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 6, 425; *State of Mississippi v. Larry Donnell Ruffin* (1979-2010), case no. 9513, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 466; *State of Mississippi v. Bobby Ray Dixon* (1980-2010), case no. 9784, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 6, 559; *State of Mississippi v. Phillip Bivens* (1980-2010) case no. 9764, *Forrest County: General Docket State Cases County Court*, vol. 5, 553; *Bobby Ray Dixon, Phillip Bivens v. State of Mississippi* (2010), case no. CI 10-0147, all in Circuit Court, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Jerry Mitchell, "Dead Wrong," *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 15, 2010; Jerry Mitchell, "Miss. Judge Tosses Out 31-year-old Rape, Murder Conviction," *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 16, 2010; "Verdict Set Aside on DNA Evidence," *Hattiesburg American*, September 16, 2010.

unattainable in the Central Piney Woods. Professor William Scarborough insisted that most whites, at least of his generation, had not changed their perspectives as he remarked: “I think race is the defining characteristic of Southern history. . . . I don’t ever see any utopia coming when people ignore race. . . . There are certain things that are never going to be eliminated: poverty, war, and race.” Douglas Jefcoat, a white Laurel resident, considered black resentment as the obstacle to racial reconciliation as he noted, “I believe that the whites are much more inclined to reconcile the differences that we’ve had in the past than the blacks. I think that the blacks, because they were so mistreated, they were so downtrodden, they were so abused in the system that they have not forgave the whites.” Former black Freedom Summer student Larry McGill was more optimistic as he observed, “Look at Mississippi compared to other states in the union . . . Mississippi has become a better place for all Americans.”⁸⁹

In 2010 the Central Piney Woods was still on its road toward redemption, but it had traveled a long way. Over the 200 years of American settlement in the Central Piney Woods, the citizens had transformed the wilds into cities and the white tyranny into biracial governments, but the wilderness lying upon the edges of the towns and the rugged mentality of the first settlers often encroached upon the city landscape with all its feral beauty and racial unrest. In the early 1800s, settlers with grand dreams had carved counties and later towns and finally cities out of the forests, and so too, they carved out their histories, some proud and defiant, some cruel and vicious, and all of them telling some truth of the incredible capacity of the human spirit for great horror and great hope.

⁸⁹ First quote, William K. Scarborough, interview; second quote, Douglas Jefcoat, interview by Patricia Buzard (Boyett), July 19, 2006, *An Oral History of Jones County*, Vol. 792, 621-622, MOHP; third quote, Larry McGill, interview by Patricia (Buzard) Boyett, April 24, 2007, MOHP recording.

The lands began as anarchist wildernesses where whispers of racial egalitarianism spread hope to the men and women of darker hues chained in bondage to white masters. They became white supremacist strongholds where the rope and the gavel replaced the bullwhip and the manacle. Still, the hope for liberation never dissipated, but beat in the black underground preparing for the days of the black revolt; for reckoning; for freedom; and finally for a state of peace.

In the twenty-first century, when blacks took over city hall, the races still remained at war with the past and each other. Segregation still haunted the society some 50 years after Clyde Kennard emphasized the illogical conclusion of the separate but equal doctrine when he asked the rhetorical questions: “Where do our parallels of separate but equal go? Are we to assume that paralleled hospitals are to be built for the two groups of doctors? Are we to build two bridges across the same stream in order to give equal opportunities to both groups of engineers? Are we to have two courts of law as to give both groups of lawyers the same chance to demonstrate their skills; two legislatures for our politically inclined, and of course two governors?” In his time, separate but equal, actually meant white domination. During the Movement and post-civil rights era, blacks desegregated these shared spaces, but residential and school segregation and racially polarized politics persisted. As blacks and whites lived somewhat parallel lives, points of intersection often resulted in confrontation with one side—and thus one race—losing. The Central Piney Woods had crushed the vestiges of the white tyranny and built a biracial republic. Yet, that republic was still racially divided.⁹⁰

By 2010 the citizens had brokered a *détente* in Laurel rather than created a state of

⁹⁰ Quoting Clyde Kennard, “Letter to Editor,” *Hattiesburg American*, December 6, 1958.

peace because blacks and whites had carved out their racial domains. A state of *détente* is possible in racial separatism, but a *détente* is always tentative and usually temporary. A state of peace is not possible with separatism because it will always breed racism. When citizens have few shared experiences, they lack the opportunity to forge emotional attachments and are more likely to develop and perpetuate racial stereotypes and myths. Finally, as they have little financial and personal investment in each others' separate societies, they have less need or motivation to work together. Thus, when racial conflicts emerge, blacks and whites are more likely to perceive each other as enemies. In Forrest County, many whites and blacks have sought to move beyond a *détente* to seek a biracial society, but the journey has only begun. At the conclusion of the first decade of the new millennium, the Central Piney Woods' disparate racial souls have yet to reconcile, and they remain stuck in purgatory. Still, many leaders and citizens hold out hope that their efforts toward racial reconciliation will at some point deliver the races out of their constant state of revolt and into a state of peace.

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